

PEER EVANGELISM OF MILLENNIALS  
VIA BIBLICAL STORYTELLING

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## ABSTRACT

### PEER EVANGELISM OF MILLENNIALS VIA BIBLICAL STORYTELLING

by

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Can learning and telling biblical stories by heart be generative for faith that will equip, empower and encourage Millennials to evangelize their peers? Three groups of Millennials learned the art of biblical storytelling, using the paradigm of performance criticism. This learning inspired them to grow in faith, which led to faith sharing with others. Two of the three study groups had a positive experience of faith development and shared their faith with one another in the group, with family and friends outside the group. This ministry model has the potential to initiate a peer evangelism outreach to Millennials by Millennials.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

CLC.....Christ Lutheran Church, Jeffersontown, Kentucky  
SB.....Christ the King Lutheran Church, South Bend, Indiana  
JTCC.....Jeffersontown Christian Church, Jeffersontown, Kentucky  
NRSV.....New Revised Standard Version

## INTRODUCTION

One of the chief challenges facing today's church is effectively communicating the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the Millennial Generation. This ministry model explores the use of biblical storytelling as a means of reaching Millennials where more traditional ministry models have fallen short. Millennials participated in a six-session study, learning and telling biblical stories by heart with their peers.

The primary context for the ministry model is Christ Lutheran Church in Jeffersontown, Kentucky. It is a vital congregation that actively carries out its mission statement of "Making Christ Known," in a wide variety of ministries that connect the congregational members to God, to one another and to the community. This project addressed a need for an intentional outreach ministry to connect with the Millennial Generation, now emerging as adults in their twenties and early thirties.

A review of sociological descriptions of the Millennial Generation will give insight into understanding the characteristics of these emerging adults who grew up in a digital post-literate culture. The digital post-literate culture has grown out of the computerization of knowledge, data storage and communication. In the literate culture that evolved in the 1500s with the implementation of the printing press, meaning has been determined by one's ability to reference truth through written documents. With the digital age, meaning is no longer dependent upon reference, but experience.

In his book, *Saving the Millennial Generation*, Dawson McAllister suggests that, “To Boomers, the Millennial Generation is a foreign culture. To reach these young people for Jesus Christ, we need to employ the principles of foreign missions.”<sup>1</sup> A review of two foreign missionary strategies of the late 1800s and early 1900s in Indonesia and Tanganyika affirms the effectiveness of peer evangelization.

A biblical model for peer evangelization is found in the story of the Samaritan woman meeting Jesus at Jacob’s well in the fourth chapter of John’s Gospel. The Samaritan woman is alienated from the mainline religion of her day. Her encounter with Jesus at the well fills her with the water of life. She discovers the true worship of God is not confined to any particular mountain or ethnic group, but is in spirit and truth. The barrier that would have separated her from Jesus was bridged by Jesus’ compassion for her. Millennials are outside of the mainline church. Yet they long to know Jesus and be embraced in his love.<sup>2</sup> Jesus declares that all people, including those outside the mainline religions, are included in the harvest of the kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God is a theme that runs throughout the biblical narrative. As Jesus begins his ministry, he declares, “The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news” (Mk 1:15)<sup>3</sup>. In Jesus and his ministry, the future fulfillment of the kingdom of God was lived into the present. The church, at its best, lives the future Kingdom of God into the present with acts of mercy, caring for the sick, providing for the homeless, feeding the hungry and being a harmonious community

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<sup>1</sup> Dawson McAllister, *Saving the Millennial Generation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1999), 148.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-139.

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

of gracious love that is open and inviting to all people. The experience of this kingdom that is at hand becomes a source of faith and hope for the future coming of the kingdom in its fullness. The Millennial Generation is more interested in the Kingdom of God that is at hand, than the kingdom that comes on the last day, or is experienced upon one's death.

Building on these foundations, the ministry model of biblical storytelling anticipates the following outcomes: 1) Telling, listening to and discussing biblical stories with their peers will be generative for faith for the Millennial participants; 2) The stories learned, and the faith generated will result in the sharing of faith with those both within and outside the group; 3) Using various tools of performance criticism will provide new insight and understanding of the stories Jesus told and that were told about him; 4) Working together in this ministry model will create a supportive community of faith; 5) Participants will explore creative ways to carry biblical storytelling into the future ministries of the congregation.

## CHAPTER 1

### MINISTRY FOCUS

The ministry model of peer evangelization of Millennials was a six-session course in the art of biblical storytelling. It was hypothesized that learning and telling biblical stories would be generative for faith in Jesus, with participants sharing that faith with others.

In the first session, the facilitator told the story of the Samaritan woman who met Jesus at Jacob's well (Jn 4:3-42). The story would serve as a model for the project. As the Samaritan woman had an experience with Jesus and went to the village to tell her story, so too would participants in the project experience Jesus in the telling of biblical stories. This would result in a faith to be shared.

The second session involved the group learning to tell the story of Jesus calming the storm at sea. (Mk 4:35-41). The group discussed ways in which they were able to connect with the story. Everyone had stormy moments in their lives and could relate to the fear of the disciples who sought out Jesus to help them. The intersection between the biblical story and personal stories is a connection that is generative for faith. With each story told, the group would be asked about their connections with the story and in what situations they might tell the story to themselves or to someone else. The group also was introduced to performance criticism, a new paradigm for understanding the scriptures, based on the assumption that they were composed as oral communication to be told.

In the last four sessions, the participants were the storytellers. They told stories they had learned during the previous week. After each story, the group would discuss its meaning for them and the connections with their own life stories. During these last four sessions, the group was introduced to methods for learning to tell biblical stories: learning the story by episodes, kinesthetic learning, drawing a picture gram and exploring the emotions of the story.

The fourth and fifth sessions included a brief discussion about the elements of an invitation. Personal invitations are extended to those with whom one has a personal relationship of respect. The invitation would be to attend worship, or the next storytelling course.

There was great enthusiasm among the Millennials that I invited to participate in this project. Initially, fourteen individuals accepted the invitation to be a part of the group. But due to work schedules, illnesses and personal crises, only five began the project, and four finished. All five had known each other previously as part of Christ Lutheran Church's youth group, even though there was an age span of eight years. The first session was like a reunion.

To expand the number of participants in the project, I invited two of my professional consultants to do the project in their congregations. Pastor Steve at Christ the King Lutheran Church in South Bend, Indiana, was very interested. His congregation was in the process of interviewing and calling a new pastor who would focus his ministry on the faith formation and discipleship of young adults. Peer evangelization based on biblical storytelling could be a good fit. There were six participants in South Bend, two married couples and two singles. They did not know each other before this project except

seeing one another at worship. I facilitated the South Bend group from my office in Jeffersontown, Kentucky, using Skype. I met with them personally for the first session and the group interview at the conclusion of the project.

The third congregation was Jeffersontown Christian Church Disciples of Christ. Pastor Doug was interested in making the project into an eight-session Bible study for their midweek Wednesday Night Alive program. Initially there were six participants, but by the end there were four. Since this was a continuation of a Bible study group, they knew each other well. Pastor Doug facilitated the group at his church. Weekly, I met with Doug to review previous sessions and discuss the objectives and activities of the next session. I met with the group in person for the first half hour of the first session and for the final group interview.

The concept of peer evangelization grew out of the foundational study of foreign missionary work by Lutherans in Tanganyika and Indonesia. In each context, the missionaries taught the indigenous people the stories of Jesus. These trained tellers of biblical stories and personal stories of faith became the evangelists to their peers. In the same way, the Millennials were taught the art of biblical storytelling so that they might tell their peers about Jesus and invite them into a relationship with him. One of the gifts of faith in Jesus is the kingdom of God that is at hand. Living as part of that kingdom guides how lives are lived and gives hope for the future coming of the kingdom of God in its eternal fullness.

### The Context

The ministry model of peer evangelization using biblical storytelling is a new paradigm for communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ to Millennials. Such a new

ministry model fits well with the 225 year history of Christ Lutheran Church in Jeffersontown, Kentucky. The vitality of the congregation for more than two centuries has depended upon its ability to make adjustments in its ministries to meet the changing needs of the congregation and community.

A schoolteacher named Samuel Mau, who came from Pennsylvania to become a circuit preacher for the Lutheran church, started Christ Lutheran Church in 1789. His preaching circuit brought him into town for one week each month. During that time, the Union Church, which was shared by four denominations, became Lutheran. In 1819, with Pastor Henry Kurtz, the first ordained pastor, Christ Lutheran Church celebrated the sacrament of Holy Communion for the first time.

The church has often had a school as a part of its ministry. The first was during the pastorate of Rev. George Yeager. Presently, the congregation has a preschool kindergarten with approximately sixty students. The current school has been in operation for nearly sixty years, serving both the congregation and the community. It has changed its curriculum and school calendar over the years to meet state regulations and community needs. Presently, there are only a handful of students whose families are members of Christ Lutheran Church.

Christian education has been an important ministry of the congregation, beginning with the first confirmation class taught in 1819, by Pastor Henry Kurtz. In the past two decades, Sunday school, Vacation Bible School and confirmation have used cutting-edge curriculums to teach the faith to the children of the congregation. Presently, the Spark Sunday school curriculum is being used for children. It focuses on the learning of biblical

stories. The confirmation program for children of middle-school age is using the Faith Inkubator program. It is designed to move one's faith from head to heart, utilizing art forms, including drama, visual art, and music. Lessons are often reviewed in TV game-show formats.

In the early 1900s, Christ Lutheran Church was one of the founding members of the Louisville Lutheran Home. This was a rest home where elderly people could live together during the last years and days of their lives. To meet federal regulations and a growing need for more rooms, the Louisville Lutheran Home built a modern ninety-eight bed facility in the 1970s. Twenty years later, the Good Samaritan Society of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, purchased it. To meet a growing community need for inpatient physical therapy, Good Samaritan is expanding its ninety-eight-bed skilled nursing facility to include a state-of-the-art physical therapy center. Christ Lutheran Church stays connected with the Good Samaritan Center providing pastoral care, weekly worship, and volunteers. Members of the congregation often move into the Good Samaritan Center when skilled nursing and physical therapy are needed.

The congregation began to grow its membership significantly during the pastoral leadership of Dr. Jesse Stomberger (1928 to 1942). During that time, the building that had been built in 1894 was expanded several times. As the congregation continued to grow, the decision was made to move to the present facility at 9212 Taylorsville Road. A new building was constructed in 1957 under the leadership of Pastor Charles Irwin. In the decades that followed, General Electric expanded its Assembly Park, which brought many Lutherans from New York and Pennsylvania into the Jeffersontown area. The congregation reached its largest membership of 1,008 baptized members in 1989. This

high point of membership occurred under the pastorate of Rev. Thomas BeMiller. During that time, the congregation was involved in pilot programs for creating new liturgies for the Lutheran Book of Worship, which would be published in 1978. The Congregation was also involved in ecumenical dialogues with the Roman Catholic Church. Christ Lutheran Church was one of the founding members of Jeffersontown Area Ministries to provide food, clothing, and financial assistance to those in need. The congregation supported three women circles, a couples club, and a group for young adults. The increasing needs of the growing congregation were met with ordained associate pastors and seminary students.

In 1996, the congregation decided to focus on youth ministry and Christian education for children and teenage youth, to accommodate a growing number of children and youth in the congregation. Tom Pairan was called as Director of Christian Education and Youth Ministry. He established groups for high school youth, middle school youth, and a spirit group for elementary age children. The Vacation Bible School program annually hosted over 100 children for the weeklong event. An evening Vacation Bible School was added to meet the needs of parents and families. Spring break mission trips to Appalachian destinations were annual events. The youth groups became leaders in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod youth ministry programs. They attended the ELCA national youth gatherings and regularly participated in Youth Encounter events, both locally and regionally. Christ Lutheran pioneered a peer ministry program for youth with other Lutheran congregations in the Louisville area.

Beginning in 1998, the congregation grew in its global awareness and outreach ministry. Four members of the congregation served on the Indiana-Kentucky Synod

global mission committee. This global awareness led to mission trips to Indonesia, Chile, Tanzania, Dominican Republic and Nicaragua. Many members of the congregation attended ELCA global mission events. The congregation was a catalyst in raising the awareness of the Indiana-Kentucky Synod concerning the oppression of the Oromo tribe in Ethiopia. In 2008, the congregation called Rev. Bimen Limbong as its associate pastor to meet a growing need for family, youth and children ministry. Pastor Bimen, originally from Indonesia, has continued to grow the global awareness of the congregation.

### A New Vision

In 2010, the congregation conducted an intensive vision study. The major event called “The Big Day,” was December 5, 2010. A coordinating team, following a model outlined in the book, *Catching the Next Wave*, by Steven Goodwin, organized the event. Approximately one hundred members and guests participated in a Sunday afternoon series of five exploration exercises. They explored the congregation’s spiritual gifts, character of hospitality, programs and activities to stop, continue or start, reasons for coming and not coming to Christ and casting a vision of what the congregation might look like in five years. Grounded in the mission statement of “Making Christ Known,” the congregation adopted, in January of 2011, a vision of “connection.” The congregation is called to be connected to God, to one another and the world through Jesus’ gracious love.

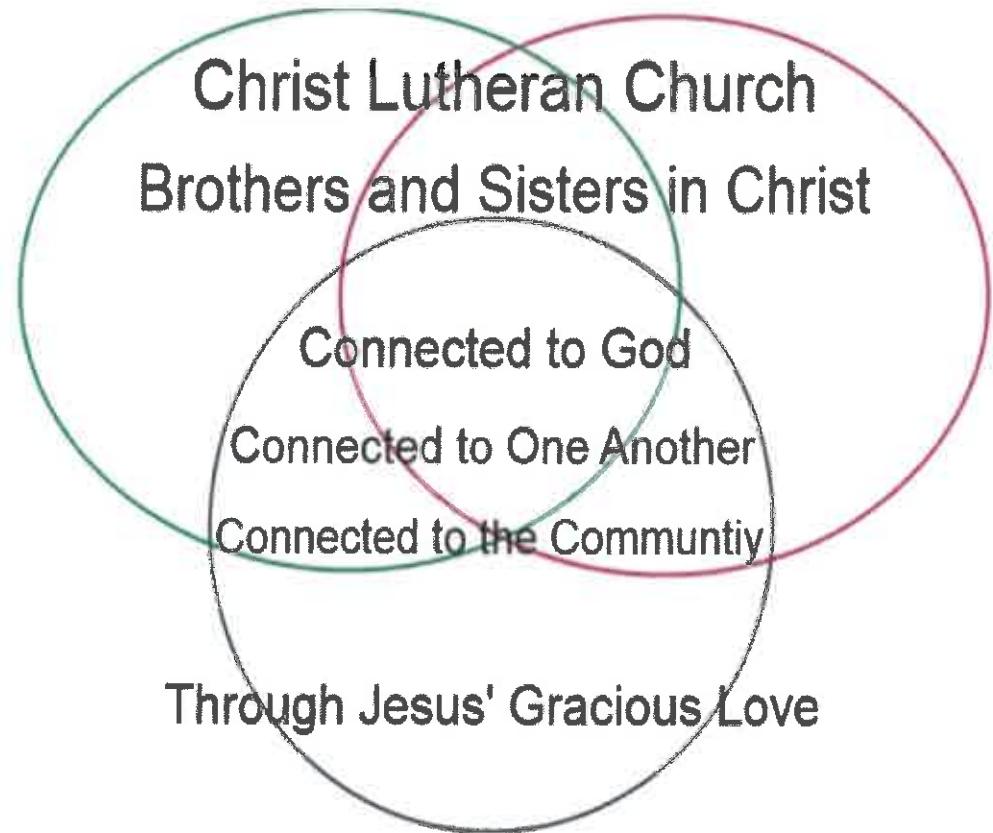


Figure 1.1

The pursuit of being connected to the community both locally and globally has led the congregation to participate in a variety groups, events and ministries. Christ Lutheran Church is a senior-citizen nutrition site for the city of Louisville. Ten to twenty senior citizens eat a catered meal together Monday through Friday. The site also distributes meals to the homebound through Meals on Wheels.

Christ Lutheran Church hosts two NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) support groups and has also become the site for the NAMI annual Kentucky State Conference. The building is also home to two Girl Scout troops, the St. Gabriel Catholic School basketball program, neighborhood association meetings and rehearsal hall for two

local musical groups. CLC has regularly hosted team meetings and Ultreya events for the Via de Cristo movement. The gym serves as the voting place for two precincts in the Jeffersontown area. Cedar Lake Ministries for the mentally challenged and the Good Samaritan Center have used the facility for meetings and training events. The Red Cross blood drives draw in members, as well as people from the community to donate. The church is prepared to be a disaster-relief center for the Red Cross and for the Good Samaritan Center when needed. The congregation supports the Jeffersontown Area Ministries with donations of food, clothing, Christmas gifts, personal hygiene items and volunteers. Members of Christ are connected to the backside ministry at Churchill Downs providing meals for Monday evening worship, Christmas gifts, prizes and volunteers for the annual picnic and financial support for the building programs. The congregation presently hosts the Japanese Christian Fellowship weekly worship on Sunday afternoons, which is a mission congregation of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. The congregation continues to be connected to global neighbors through the Indiana-Kentucky Synod companionship program with the Lutheran churches in Chile and Indonesia. Indonesian students of church music at the Louisville Southern Baptist Seminary have been employed as musicians for the Saturday evening worship.

The congregation is connected to one another through the weekly gathering for worship. One Another Thursdays is a series of short-term Bible studies led by the pastors. There are three women's groups that gather for Bible study, fellowship and service. The weekly Sunday school program has classes for preschool through high school and three adult classes. A BeFRIENDERS peer ministry was begun in 2012 to provide companionship for members going through personal and spiritual crisis. The 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the

congregation was celebrated with ~~monthly~~ events throughout 2014. Many former members and visitors attended the events. One event of the anniversary was a photo church directory.

To improve communications, a more comprehensive website was designed to communicate with the congregation and community. A Facebook page was developed to post photos of past events and announcements of future events. A prayer chain connects many members via email to pray for those in need. A weekly good news email is prepared by the pastors and sent out via email. Most members receive the monthly newsletter via the Internet.

The congregation connection with God is grounded in the weekly worship of word and sacrament. The 5:30 P.M. Saturday worship was an addition that grew out of the vision study. It is an informal setting of the Lord's Supper. The Sunday service at 8:30 A.M. is a traditional setting of the liturgy from the Evangelical Lutheran Worship book. The 11:00 A.M. Sunday service alternates between the traditional worship similar to the 8:30 A.M. service and a contemporary service of worship and praise. Keyboard, guitars, African drum, and rhythm instruments accompany the liturgy created by the worship committee. Two creative worship opportunities are a Holy Communion liturgy of meditation and song, and the St. Thomas Mass, modeled after the Tuomasmessu at St. Mikael Agricola Church in Helsinki, Finland. Perhaps the most significant worship developments in the congregation, in the past two decades, are weekly celebration of Holy Communion and lowering the age of first communion from sixth grade to six years old.

## Covenant Group Study and Implementation

As a result of the vision process, the congregation moved forward to purchase a new pipe organ. When estimates were greater than the balance in the organ fund, the congregation considered a capital fundraising campaign. In addition to the pipe organ, other capital improvements were added to the project. The Covenant Group, a local fundraising consultant, was hired to do a feasibility study. The study measured the ministries, attitudes and financial potential of the congregation.

### Key Strengths

1. Spirit of community among church members
2. Strong pastoral and spiritual leadership
3. Worship experience and liturgy
4. Christian education opportunities
5. Outreach to the community

### Key Challenges

1. Lack of outreach to youth and young families
2. Lack of volunteerism / involvement
3. Lack of communication regarding church events
4. Declining attendance / aging population
5. Facilities need upgrading / improvement

### Key Priorities

1. Evangelism / increased membership / preach Gospel
2. Improving facilities
3. Improve youth programs – youth director / religious education

4. Outreach ministry – locally / globally

5. Spiritual growth and involvement

As recommended by the Covenant Group study, the congregation entered a capital campaign with a goal of \$508,000. The resulting campaign achieved the estimated goal for a five-year pledge period. In 2013, capital improvements were completed to the building making it more energy efficient and environmentally friendly. The new pipe organ was installed in 2014, and the inaugural recital was played to a full sanctuary on October 5. These facility improvements, which the congregation had identified as the first priorities, were successfully completed.

The challenge of reaching out to young families has been addressed through an active Spirit Group, which is made up of preschool and elementary aged children. A monthly event is planned and coordinated by groups of parents. There is a balance of learning events, service events and fellowship events. There have been as many as one hundred participants for the Christmas birthday party for Jesus, Egg-stravaganza at Easter, and All Saints Day trunk and treat. Not only have these programs been faith formational for the children, but have also created significant relationships among the parents who range in age from the mid-30s to early 40s. Their increased participation in the Spirit Group has moved some parents into leadership roles within the congregation.

### The Advent of Biblical Storytelling

In meeting the priority of preaching the gospel, a major shift in the worship practice is the weekly telling of the Gospel lesson by the pastors. It came as a result of my 2009 sabbatical study. I had attended a preaching conference. The keynote speaker

lamented that most people sitting in our pews do not know the biblical stories. That evening the keynote speaker preached at the evening worship. He told stories about NFL football, a novel he was reading and a movie he had just seen to illustrate the points of his sermon. No biblical stories were told.

I began to wonder if the reason people in the pews do not know the biblical stories is the preachers are not telling them. People seem to remember told stories. Parishioners have come to me and reminded me of stories that I had told months ago in a sermon. They connected with the telling of the story and remembered. But they just do not seem to remember the biblical stories, even though these stories are read each week in worship, following a three-year lectionary cycle. Many of the biblical stories occur each year in the lectionary. Though people have heard them read, they still do not know the stories. So I began to tell biblical stories in worship instead of reading them.

My manual for doing this has been the book, *Story Journey, And Invitation to the Gospel as Storytelling*, by Thomas E. Boomershine. I also learned about and joined the Network of Biblical Storytellers. For three consecutive years, I attended the annual festival gathering where I learned the art of biblical storytelling through the various workshops and keynote speakers. I was spiritually moved as I listened to the epic telling of Genesis, Isaiah and the Gospel of John.

The weekly telling of the Gospel lesson in the worship services at CLC has been well received. The congregation has grown to expect the Gospel being told at worship. Even though the biblical text is printed in the bulletin, the majority of the congregation puts down the text to be caught up in the Gospel stories being told.

On Transfiguration Sunday 2012 I told the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7).

Several people said that it was a great sermon and wanted to know if they could have a written copy. I told 1 Corinthians 13 at my nephew's wedding. At the reception, a number of people came up to me and asked where I had gotten my material. They had been moved by the presentation. The biblical stories, when told, seem to have a power of their own.

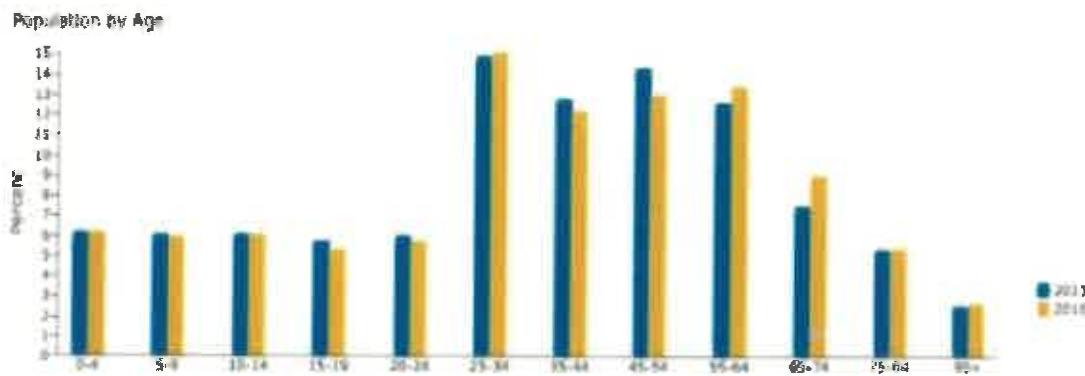
I decided to try storytelling among my peers. In 2012, I led a breakout session at our annual Indiana-Kentucky Synod Assembly. The workshop involved a brief introduction to biblical storytelling and a telling of the Samaritan Woman who met Jesus at Jacob's well, from the fourth chapter of John's Gospel. The eighty clergy and lay leaders who attended the breakout session were spellbound as they were drawn into the story. One pastor commented, "So if you tell the Gospel like this, you really don't need a sermon, do you?" More affirmation came in the following months from pastors who had decided to try telling the Gospel in worship. They found it to be both generative for the faith of the congregation and the teller.

### The Evolution of the Project

I entered into this D. Min. program with the anticipation of creating a retreat format for pastors to learn the art of biblical storytelling. I envisioned offering workshops before each season of the church year for pastors to hear the Gospels for the season and begin to do storytelling preparation and sermon preparation together. I was hopeful that enough pastors would find this helpful that it would create an ongoing ministry that could

revolutionize the way the Gospel is proclaimed in worship. Leading these retreats would provide a vital ministry for me when I retired from parish ministry.

As I began the contextual study for the project, I requested a 2010 census report for the area with a five-mile radius of Christ Lutheran Church building. The graph below opened my eyes to a surprising reality.



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000 Census of Population and Housing. Esri forecasts 2010 and 2015.

Figure 1.2

The two largest age groups in the area are Baby Boomers and Millennials, each at about fifteen percent. When I compared that to the worship attendance at Christ Lutheran Church, I discovered that on an average Sunday, only five percent of the worshipers are Millennials. I was also reminded of the Covenant Group report that listed outreach to youth and young families as a key challenge. We were successfully reaching out to young families with children, but we had no outreach to the Millennial Generation. The congregation had done well in upgrading its facilities. There has been a focus on living out the mission of “Making Christ Known,” through the connections with God, one another and the community. Now is the time to intentionally connect to the Millennials in

our congregation and community with an evangelistic outreach through the mission model of peer evangelism via biblical storytelling.

Even though I have a twenty-three-year-old son, I came to a shocking reality that I did not know the Millennial Generation. I discovered that I was not the only Baby Boomer pastor in that predicament. In his book, *Saving the Millennial Generation*, by Dawson McAllister, I discovered two sentences that shaped this project. “To Boomers, the Millennial Generation is a foreign culture. To reach these young people for Jesus Christ, we need to employ the principles of foreign missions.”<sup>1</sup>

There are twenty-six Millennials on the active membership roster of Christ Lutheran Church. Most are not regular worshipers. Many have grown up in the congregation and participated in the youth group and confirmation instruction. I still have a good relationship with them. But I had not taken the time to get to know them as emerging adults, to discover their spiritual needs and the personal issues that they face daily. I did not understand how different they are from previous generations as a result of growing up in a digital, post-literate culture. Reading sociological studies describing the Millennial Generation convinced me to focus the research project on winning them into the fellowship of Christ. As digital communication has hit the scene, meaning and truth are no longer determined by reference to documents of printed material. Meaning for people of the digital age is found through experience. For example, consider a person trying to change a flat tire on a car. Meaning by reference means finding the maintenance manual in the car to read how to replace the flat. Meaning by experience turns to the smart phone and calls up YouTube. Through the virtual experience of watching someone

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<sup>1</sup> McAllister, 148.

change a tire, the repair is made. To persons of a culture informed by experience, the proclamation of the Gospel needs to focus on providing experiences of Jesus, rather than teaching and preaching classical doctrine. Biblical storytelling, both hearing and telling, can be the source of such experiences that can transform lives. It seems naïve to think storytelling could have such a great impact on peoples' lives. But in the early days of the church, storytelling was the medium that sent shockwaves throughout the known world that Jesus Christ is Lord of all. This ministry model explored the power of biblical story to create faith and motivate Millennials to share that faith with their peers.

The concept of peer evangelism was at the heart of Lutheran missionary work in Tanganyika, East Africa, in the early to mid-1900. I learned this firsthand from my father in law, who served as a missionary in Tanganyika for the Augustana Lutheran Church. In 2005, I took my wife and son to the birth land of my wife. We went with a small mission group and toured ministries around Arusha, Tanzania. We also went to the bush country to visit a Masai boma near Ketebene. We took backpacks, flashlights and water bottles for the evangelists that traveled from the local church to the villages. It was a well-organized peer evangelization process. The evangelists were trained in the mission church and sent out to tell the Gospel in their villages. In 2013, my wife and I climbed Kilimanjaro out of the city of Moshi, Tanzania. While in Moshi, we were blessed to meet the Lutheran Bishop of that diocese. The church is vital and growing. It is a testimony to the success of the missionaries working to teach the indigenous people to evangelize their peers. Today, the Tanzanian Lutheran Church is managed by a Tanzanian Bishop. The success of this missionary work can be applied to reaching out to American Millennials with the gospel of Jesus.

The missionary work to the Batak in North Sumatra, Indonesia, in the late 1800s and early 1900s had similar results as Tanzania. Ludwig Nomensen taught the Batak the good news about Jesus so they could tell family and friends who lived in their villages. My connection with the Batak people is through my associate pastor, Bimen Limbong, who is Batak from Indonesia. The Batak Church is one of the fastest growing Christian churches in the world. The focus of Batak evangelism is every baptized member is called to invite family and friends to Christ. The pastors and Bible teachers support the congregations in this peer ministry of evangelism. The stories of Jesus are told and invitations extended, even though North Sumatra is predominantly Muslim and it is illegal to proselytize.

Chapter three discusses the histories of each of these two missionary efforts that affirm the effectiveness of peer evangelization. The role of the missionaries and the pastors was to train the local people to share their faith with their peers and bring them to Christ. The ministry model researched in this project employed these foreign missionary strategies to reach out to American Millennials, by training them to evangelize their peers.

Chapter two discusses a biblical model for peer evangelization found in the story of the Samaritan woman meeting Jesus at Jacob's well (Jn 4:3-42). The Samaritan woman is outside of the mainline religion of her day. Not welcomed at the Temple in Jerusalem, she practiced her faith as her ancestors on Mount Gerizim. Having had five husbands, plus a live-in partner, and going to the well at noon reveals a person outside the normal daily practice, living life her own way. Her encounter with Jesus at the well filled her with the water of life. She discovered that the place to worship is not on any

particular mountain, but God is worshiped in spirit and truth. The ethnic barrier that would have separated her from Jesus was bridged by Jesus' compassion for her. The discussion Jesus had with his disciples, in the middle of the story, declared Samaritans to be included in the harvest of the kingdom. Jesus performed and proclaimed a radical act of reconciliation, as Jews and Samaritans shared nothing in common. Having experienced Jesus, the Samaritan woman returned to her village, where people would have known her well. She announced, "I just met a man that told me everything I ever did. He can't be the Messiah, can he? Come and see." The story of her personal experience brought the entire village out to the well, where they also met Jesus. As they experienced his words, they were drawn to believe that Jesus is the Savior of the world.

Millennials who feel outside the well-established religious orders easily identify with the Samaritan woman. Her faith is brought alive, not by doctrinal teaching, but by an experience with Jesus. Meaning as experience fits the digital-age profile. The experience that makes faith come alive is not something to be hoarded, but something that naturally is to be shared. The ministry model researched here was patterned on the story of the Samaritan woman. Millennials experienced Jesus in telling and hearing biblical stories. That experience with Jesus was generative for faith and was naturally shared with peers. The faith-sharing is not to strangers standing on a street corner waiting for a bus, but family and friends who know the teller and will be attentive to the biblical story and experience of Jesus which they will tell.

Dawson McAllister suggests, “The first step for evangelists is to find the right hook, the piercing metaphor, the ‘aha!’ concept to ‘open their eyes.’”<sup>2</sup> One of the “aha!” moments in the Samaritan woman story is the inclusion of the Samaritans into the harvest of the kingdom. Pew research has found Millennials are more tolerant than previous generations of people different than themselves.<sup>3</sup> This is in direct tension with the world they are inheriting that is wrought with prejudice, hatred, violence, and mistrust. They long for a sense of hope for the present and into the future that there is a place for all people. The hope they long for can be found in the kingdom of God that is at hand, and the eschatological kingdom of God to come at the end of time.

Chapter four discusses the kingdom of God, a theme that runs throughout the biblical narrative. Jesus fulfills the prophetic sayings of the kingdom on the last day, as he lives the future kingdom into the present. The church, the body of Christ, lives the future kingdom into the present with acts of mercy, caring for the sick, providing for the homeless, feeding the hungry and being a harmonious community of gracious love that is open and inviting to all people. The experience of this kingdom that is at hand becomes a source of faith and hope for the future coming of the kingdom in its fullness. The good news of the kingdom of God was a focus in the biblical stories of this ministry model.

### Called to be a Storyteller

I believe that God has called me to be a storyteller and to use this gift to proclaim that the time is fulfilled, that in Jesus the kingdom of God is at hand. The discernment of

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<sup>2</sup> McAllister, 149.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Taylor and Scott Keeter eds. “Millennials, A Portrait of Generation Next, Confident. Connected. Open to Change.” Pew Research, February, 2010, accessed February 23, 2013, <http://www.pewresearch.org/millennials>. 51.

this gift began in my early childhood as I sat and listened to one of the most gifted storytellers I have ever heard. Her name was Edith Poisel, my grandmother. She was born in the late 1800s. She had so many great stories about life in the old days. My favorite stories were about her career teaching in a one-room schoolhouse. She was a woman of great faith, who loved to sing God's praise in an awesome alto voice.

At about age ten, I remember a Bible study at Camp Lutherwald. The story was about Jesus driving the demons from a man named Legion into a herd of pigs. The pigs ran off the cliff and drowned. Having grown up on a farm, the pigs going off the cliff caught my attention. The focus shifted to Jesus and his healing power. Faith in Jesus became real for me at Camp Lutherwald. I spent at least a week there each summer until I turned sixteen. Then I joined the staff as a counselor. For four summers, I was the go-to guy for stories around the campfire, not just funny stories, but also stories about Jesus. As I told them, they became more real for me.

I served on the Indiana-Kentucky Synod youth ministry task force my last two years in high school. I learned how the church in its various expressions operated. In my college years, I served on the Synod outdoor ministry committee. At the end of my first year as a high school teacher, I was asked to be the director at Lutheran Hills Camp. The program was in a shambles, and it would require changing the culture to focus on Christian education, as well as hiking, swimming and campfires. Pastor Joe Robb was my partner in training the staff. I still told stories around the campfires, but my responsibility was to manage the program, not be the program. So I taught the staff how to tell stories of faith, connecting their life story with the biblical story.

As a teacher of chemistry and general math at Alexandria-Monroe High School in Alexandria, Indiana, I taught the brightest students and those who seemed doomed to fail. I created stories to teach the chemistry concepts. I used games to encourage the general math students to learn math skills to be able to play and win the games. The last day of my fourth year of teaching I went to the principal's office to give him my letter of resignation, as I was leaving to go to seminary. He gave me an envelope with a letter nominating me for science teacher of the year in the state of Indiana. My love and success in teaching had been recognized.

I felt called by God to go to seminary. My wife and family affirmed it. My congregation nominated me. I had passed all the rigors of examination by the Synod candidacy committee and the seminary registrar. I felt like all of my life experiences had prepared me for that moment. I excelled as a student. I learned the power of God's story and how that connected to my life story. Dr. Austin Shell, co-author of the Lutheran Church in America Word and Witness course was one of my professors. He encouraged us to think in stories, to recognize that faith takes place where our story and God's story overlap.

My first call as parish pastor was to Faith Lutheran Church in Owensboro, Kentucky. The congregation had just gone through a tumultuous time with the previous pastor. On my first Sunday ninety-five people gathered for worship. The second Sunday, thirty-five came. There was much forgiveness and reconciliation work to do. The stories of Jesus' grace and reconciliation began to heal the congregation. After ten years in Owensboro, I followed God's calling me to Trinity Lutheran Church in Richmond, Indiana. I had left a relatively young congregation to serve one that would celebrate its

one-hundredth anniversary the second month I was their pastor. After five years the ministry at Trinity was going very well. The congregation was considering a second pastor to join the staff to focus on evangelism. I was excited about the possibilities that were ahead.

But Indiana-Kentucky Synod Bishop Kempski asked me to interview at Christ Lutheran Church in Jeffersontown, Kentucky. I declined three times. I had fulfilled my original commitment of serving five years at Trinity, but everything was just falling into place there. Was God calling me to a new place with even greater ministry challenges? As I sat in the interview at Christ, I noticed my wife nodding off, as if she were going to sleep. It was at that moment she sensed we would be moving. I possessed the gifts to meet the needs and challenges that the call committee was expressing. It was a tough decision, but I followed God's call.

I taught and preached in story. I would tell my own paraphrases of the biblical stories, which captured the imagination of members in the congregation. They discovered in a new and profound way that these stories were true and conveyed important meaning. The previous pastor of thirty-two years was a scholarly type, and preached long sermons loaded with complex theological quotes to support the doctrines being preached. My style of preaching was more narrative. Several members came to me and said, "I didn't realize I could understand a sermon until you came along. I love your stories. They make faith come alive for me." At Christmas and Easter, I often told these incredible stories from the perspective of one of the characters in the story. I might portray an angel, keeper of the stable, or gardener in the cemetery.

In 2008, I submitted a grant to the Lily Endowment for a sabbatical study of biblical story. The research for the grant proposal led me to the Network of Biblical Storytellers. I attended the first of three annual festival gatherings. Biblical storytelling was the heart of a week of worship, workshops and conversations with people from across the country and around the world. I met founder Tom Boomershine. He invited attendees to enroll in a D. Min. program at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. My palms got sweaty. My heart rate increased. I had not felt this way for quite a while. I sensed God calling me once again to step out of my comfort zone and follow the Lord's lead. The call was confirmed in personal conversations that I had with Tom and other potential students. The call was confirmed by my congregation, which encouraged me and added more continuing-education time to my compensation package. I had begun serving as a vacancy pastor for a small congregation, which paid a stipend that helped cover tuition. My wife was encouraging. And most importantly, I could look back at my life experience and sense God leading me to this new venture.

I had discovered that my gift of teaching enabled me to teach others to tell. It was a blessing to see how excited people can get when they tell a biblical story, something they thought they could never do. I remember a Bible study a year or so ago when a 90-year-old woman told a prophetic saying from Isaiah. She was nervous. Her voice quivered. It brought tears to her eyes and to the other eight people listening. It was truly an experience of that saying of promise, which became unforgettable, especially as she told it. The emotion of the prophet was conveyed as well as the words. I have also taught a group of peer counselors, called BeFrienders, the story of the lost sheep. We learned it in just fifteen minutes, then told it to each other and considered what it must be like to be

the one lost, the ninety-nine and the shepherd. We considered when we might tell the story to those with whom they were ministering.

#### Connected for Dissemination

God's calling me to this project has also been confirmed by the many connections that I have made over the years that will make it possible to disseminate the results of this research. The ministry model created and the lessons learned need not stay in a dissertation on a library shelf, but can be set into motion.

The Indiana-Kentucky Synod mission statement is about equipping, empowering, and encouraging members of the synod to be missionaries. There has been very little interpretation of what it means to be a missionary. If the ministry model works for Millennials, it may prove to be an effective model for interpreting the Synod mission statement and put it into action. I have many connections in the Synod that can be avenues for implementing this model of peer evangelization through the telling of biblical stories.

I served on the candidacy committee for seven years, with three years as the chairperson. Many of the candidates for ministry that I mentored are now mid-career pastors in Indiana and Kentucky. I have served six years on the Synod Council, and have made many connections with pastors, lay leaders and the Bishop and his staff.

The past three years I helped design a church council workshop that was conducted in three conferences in the southern part of our synod. I taught a workshop on visioning the future of one's congregation by catching a glimpse of what God is calling a

congregation to be and do. I also taught a workshop on understanding the church council as having a Myers-Briggs personality type. Both were creative approaches to challenging topics. They were both well received, and I have a reputation of being creative and effective in practice and teaching various elements of ministry.

In the past eighteen years, I have been active in the Indiana-Kentucky Via de Cristo movement. The weekend retreats bring sixty to seventy lay leaders and pastors together for spiritual renewal. I often presented my talks in a narrative style, telling both personal stories and biblical stories to teach the concept of God's grace. I have become well known and respected in the congregations that have participated in the Via de Cristo movement.

I have also had the blessing of being connected to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. This would give me a global audience for both teaching and learning the power of biblical storytelling. On November 23, 2014, our congregation had its last official celebration of our 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It was a multicultural celebration of thanksgiving. In my sermon for that day, I stitched together a few biblical stories to support the theme of thanksgiving that Jesus is Lord and king of all. I concluded with a biblical blessing, not read but spoken directly to the congregation. After the worship, one of our guests, who is a missionary from Tanzania to Salem Lutheran Church in Indianapolis, said, "You have to come and do that in Tanzania. They will think it is Jesus himself speaking."

Through my associate pastor, Bimen Limbong, I have come to know Indonesian students at Southern Baptist Seminary. Having earned their advanced degrees, they are

now leaders in seminaries in Indonesia. They have been interested in the art of biblical storytelling. I will continue to be connected to those seminary leaders through their friendship with Bimen.

The Millennial Generation is an international generation by virtue of the digital communication available worldwide. Communication characteristics of the primary oral cultures of Africa and Southeast Asia, share many commonalities with the secondary oral culture of the digital Western nations. Principles of the project that are effective with Millennials in one nation may be effective in other nations. As the project is shared, each global area may inform one another in the development of this Gospel sharing process.

Another connection for dissemination of the ministry model is with my D. Min. peer group. The group is exploring ways in which our projects can be shared. The various projects in our peer group cover a variety of applications of biblical storytelling: pastoral care, prison ministry, discipleship, worship, digital communication and evangelism. The goal is to let these projects have a life after the D. Min. is completed.

All of these affirmations stir within me a calling from God to create a ministry model that reaches out to the Millennial Generation with biblical storytelling. It has grown out of an active ministry of Christ Lutheran Church that faithfully strives to live out its mission of “Making Christ Known,” by being connected to God, one another and the community. It recognized that of all the ministries performed in the name of Christ, an intentional outreach to Millennials is not one of them. There is a growing need to discover new and effective ways of communicating the Gospel in a digital post literate

culture. The foundational studies that follow make a compelling case for a ministry model of peer evangelism, using biblical storytelling.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

### COME AND SEE

How does one share the Good News of Jesus Christ the Savior of the world with one's own culture, and other cultures as well? That was the question confronting the composer of John's Gospel. The audience was primarily Jewish, but John's audience would also include Gentiles. How could they "come and see" Jesus in his story so that believing in Jesus' name they would receive the gift of life?

John composed his Gospel as a series of stories, each built on the previous one. Themes such as "come and see" stitch the stories together as one unit. This paper is a performance criticism of the story in (Jn 4:5-42), the meeting of Jesus and a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. The task of performance criticism is to recapture the oral dimensions of the story to understand how the storyteller may have told it, and how the audience of the first century heard it.

The performance criticism paradigm is a shift from the historical critical methods of studying the scriptures that have been developed over the past two centuries, beginning with Johann Semler (1729-91), who suggested the Bible must be treated like any other book.<sup>1</sup> Historical critical methods treat the scriptures as documents meant to be studied in an "objective" scientific approach. Performance criticism recognizes that the scriptures were originally oral compositions which were performed. In his keynote address at the

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<sup>1</sup> N. L. Geisler, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 157.

2007 Network of Biblical Storytellers, David Rhoades said, “We know that they were done as a whole and that they were probably done by memory and that they were performed in lively emotional ways.”<sup>2</sup> Rhoades was speaking both about the Gospels and the Letters of the New Testament.

The Gospel of John, for example, was performed as a story in one sitting by one or more storytellers. The story was told, not read. The first written manuscripts were written as “sound” documents. They had neither word separation nor punctuation. The purpose of the manuscript was to support the oral performance as told story.

A performance criticism study begins with determining a sound map that pictures the sounds of the story. The sounds include the voice of the storyteller expressing the characters’ attitudes and emotions, as well as the mood of the setting. The storyteller would present herself or himself as the teller, but also took on the role of narrator as well as each of the characters, embodying them for the audience. The sound also included the storyteller directly addressing the audience, as the performance is an event, and the audience does not just hear it, they experience it.<sup>3</sup>

To create a sound map, the text is broken down into *cola*, phrases of sound expressed in one breath. A long colon is spoken more quickly to get all of the sounds expressed in one breath. A shorter colon is spoken more slowly. *Cola* are grouped into periods, which indicate the completion of a thought. A longer pause marks the end of each period. This flow of sound gives life and rhythm to the performance. For example, a series of *cola* may begin soft and build to a crescendo. Short *cola*, spoken softly, may

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<sup>2</sup> David Rhoades, “Welcome Back: Stories in Celebration of our Homecoming” (lecture, Festival Gathering of the Network of Biblical Storytellers, 2007), 15.

<sup>3</sup> David Rhoades, *Performance Events in Early Christianity: New Testament Writings in an Oral Context* (Tuebingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 178.

create a feeling of intimacy. The sound map also gives the storyteller groups of sounds, words, to learn as episodes. Learning the episodes separately, then finding words or feelings that connect the episodes, makes the story easier to learn and remember. A sample of a sound map for a portion of John 4 follows:

- 1.1 So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar,
- 1.2 near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.
- 2.1 Jacob's well was there,
- 2.2 and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well.
- 3.1 It was about noon.
- 4.1 A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her,
- 4.2 "Give me a drink."
- 5.1 His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.
- 6.1 The Samaritan woman said to him,
- 6.2 "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"
- 7.1 (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)
- 8.1 Jesus answered her,
- 8.2 "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."
- 9.1 The woman said to him,
- 9.2 "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep.
- 10.1 Where do you get that living water?
- 11.1 Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"
- 12.1 Jesus said to her,
- 12.2 "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty.
- 13.1 The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

14.1 The woman said to him,  
 14.2 "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

15.1 Jesus said to her,  
 15.2 "Go, call your husband, and come back."

16.1 The woman answered him,  
 16.2 "I have no husband."

17.1 Jesus said to her,  
 17.2 "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband';  
 17.3 for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband.

18.1 What you have said is true!"

### Sounds of the Story

From the sound map and text one can identify directives for expressing the sounds in the performance of the story. As the story begins, John tells us that Jesus was tired from a long journey. The storyteller begins with a tired voice, low in volume, and slow. The tiredness reveals Jesus' humanity. The woman responded with a surprised, even amazed voice.<sup>4</sup> Jesus has crossed the boundary of personal etiquette by talking to a woman other than his wife, and worse yet, a Samaritan. A Jewish audience would have quickly recognized this breach of etiquette. And for the Gentiles in the audience, John includes a parenthetical statement about Jews and Gentiles not sharing things in common. This would have been spoken as the storyteller directly giving inside information to the audience.

Jesus awoke from his tiredness to reply in a voice that "springs" forth with new life. The woman's surprise turned to confusion, "How are you going to give me water? The well is deep. You have no bucket. Are you greater than Jacob?" Jesus' voice gushed

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Krystar, *Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament, John* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 63.

with excitement and promise as he spoke of the water that he gives. “Whoever drinks of the water I give will never thirst again.” That sounded good to the Samaritan woman, so she asked expectantly for some of the water.

“Go get your husband,” Jesus says in a matter-of-fact voice, as if he doesn’t know her living situation. “But I have no husband,” the woman declares. It is a voice of despair; she just wants the water. With compassion Jesus tells her of her husband situation in a sympathetic, comforting way. If he is accusatory or judgmental, the woman may walk away. His intent is to fill her with the living water. Her response is the response of one whose eyes of faith are open, “Wow!” As she changes the subject, her voice stutters as if she is looking for the right thing to say.

Jesus now speaks not only to the woman, but also to the audience, so the storyteller’s voice is raised and directed more toward the audience. The storyteller, embodying Jesus, addresses the issue of true worship. There is excitement in the woman’s voice, as she expresses expectations about worship and about the Messiah. This would have caught the attention of the audience, as these issues were commonly debated in first century Judaism.

The disciples interrupted the conversation with words they did not say, but are spoken by the storyteller, again as inside information given directly to the audience. The disciples’ words are spoken in a voice that mirrors the woman’s amazement toward Jesus. They are surprised Jesus is speaking to a Samaritan woman. Jesus now speaks in a teaching, prophetic voice as he talks to the disciples and audience about being sent into the harvest.

As the woman enters the village, her testimony is one of excitement, gushing with life and invitation. It is a loud voice, broadcasting to the gathered crowd. The storyteller speaks it to the crowd gathered, the audience. "Come and see. He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"

The voice of the crowd from Sychar at the end of the story matches the same intensity of the voice of the Samarian woman's witness and invitation. The crowd speaks as one voice, declaring that their faith is based on hearing Jesus' word. The crowd in Sychar has become a model for the audience to come to see Jesus and hear his word so that they too may come to know Jesus who is the savior of the world.

#### Audience of Address

The difference between drama and storytelling is that in drama an actor spends the entire play portraying one character, with the audience watching the interaction between the various characters of the drama. In storytelling, the teller continues to be him or herself, embodying the various characters of the story, including the narrator. Often the storyteller embodying the character speaks directly to the audience, with the audience assuming the role of characters in the story. In the Gospel of John, the storyteller often is Jesus speaking to the audience as Jews or disciples. He speaks to them as Jews being attracted to him (John 1-4). The storyteller becomes Jesus speaking to Jews who are wrestling with the belief or disbelief that Jesus is the Messiah (Jn 5-12). In (Jn13-17), the storyteller is Jesus speaking intimately with those who are followers, disciples who believe in him and love him. This dynamic flow of audience participation reveals John's intent for the audience to move from being drawn to Jesus, to questioning their belief in

Jesus as they decide to accept or reject him, and finally to become intimate loving disciples.<sup>5</sup>

In the story of the Samaritan woman, the audience is primarily Jewish. They can understand the tension of social norms being violated as they watch the dialog between the woman and Jesus unfold. They can identify with the woman in her surprise that Jesus even speaks to her and then he asks her for a drink. The audience may also have similar questions about how Jesus is going to get this living water without a bucket. Jacob's well was known by first-century Jews in Palestine as being a good source of water, but it was very deep. Hellenistic Jews may not have known about Jacob's well, but would have known the need for a bucket to fetch water. There may have also been some Gentiles in the audience, indicated by the fact that the storyteller coaches the audience about the Jews not sharing anything with Samaritans.

The audience can also identify with her anticipation of the coming of the Messiah. The temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed in C.E. 70. Jews and Samaritans alike were looking for a Messiah who would free them from their oppressive political reality under the Roman Empire. They may have the same question that the woman raises as she goes back to the village to tell people, "He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" At the same time it would feel odd, even distasteful, for the Jews in the audience to identify with a Samaritan. There had been a great division between Samaritans and Jews for a long time:

The Samaritans were the descendants of two groups: a) the remnant of the native Israelites who were not deported at the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C.; b) foreign colonists brought in from Babylonia and Media by the Assyrian conquerors of Samaria... There was a theological opposition between these Northerners and the Jews of the South because of the Samaritan refusal to worship at

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Boomershine, *The Medium and Message of John: Audience Address and Audience Identity in the Fourth Gospel* (London: T&T Clark International, 2011), 94.

Jerusalem. This was aggravated by the fact that after the Babylonian exile the Samaritans had put obstacles in the way of the Jewish restoration of Jerusalem, and that in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. the Samaritans had helped the Syrian monarchs in their war against the Jews. In 128 B.C. the Jewish high priest burned the Samaritan temple of Gerizim.<sup>6</sup>

Jesus models reconciliation of this great divide as he welcomes the Samaritan woman and gives her the gift of water gushing up to eternal life. At the end of this episode Jesus welcomes the entire Samaritan village of Sychar. In between these acts of welcome he addressed the ancient controversy of the place of worship. To worship God is to not go to one of the holy mountains of Zion or Gerizim, but to worship God is to worship in spirit and truth. That spirit and truth worship is not exclusive to a place or an ethnic group. Both Jew and Samaritan are invited to worship God in truth, wherever the spirit blows.

The previous story addressed the issue of spirit in the conversation of Jesus and Nicodemus. The New Testament Greek word for spirit and wind is *pneuma*. “The wind blows where it wills,” said Jesus to Nicodemus, and the audience. “You do not know from where it comes or where it goes.” God is available to be worshiped anywhere by anyone. This identifying with the Samaritan woman would have thrown the audience into a dilemma. They would not have wanted to be associated with her, but they wanted to know about worshiping God and about Jesus being the Messiah.

The concept of Messiah was more than a theological notion. Waiting for the Messiah was a living hope for Jews and Samaritans. The hope was kept alive in the words of the prophets like Jeremiah:

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal

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<sup>6</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII, Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1966), 170.

wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.' Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the Lord, when it shall no longer be said, "As the Lord lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of Egypt," but "As the Lord lives who brought out and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the land of the north and out of all the lands where he had driven them." Then they shall live in their own land (Jer 23:5-8).

The first-century Jewish audience would have immediately thought of Messiah as the leader to bring about political freedom from Rome.

This is the second time that Jesus is identified as the Messiah in John's story. It occurred earlier in Andrew's witness to his brother Peter, "We have found the Messiah." And he brought Peter to meet Jesus. Now as the Samaritan woman announces her expectations of the coming Messiah who will proclaim all things to us, Jesus says to her, "I am he." The line is also directed to the audience as the storyteller, speaking as Jesus declares, "I am he." The audience must then deal with several questions. If Jesus is the Messiah, the chosen one to be king, what is he doing out in the hot sun; at Jacob's well talking to a Samaritan woman? What does this have to do with the fall of Rome? Or is there something more about this eternal life that we need to know? Could Jesus be a different kind of Messiah than we have been looking for? These mental questions would have kept the audience listening for some answers.

With respect to the Messiah, Jesus said, "I am he." "I am," are the words of God spoken from the burning bush to Moses. This "I am" is one of the phrases that stitches together the Gospel of John. As the audience hears the "I am he," it is the first of a series of "I am" statements that compose a sound portrait of Jesus. I am the bread of life. I am the good shepherd. I am the gate. I am the way the truth and the life. I am he, the

Messiah. The audience who was drawn to Jesus would be confronted with the questions: Is Jesus really the Messiah? Is he the one to be worshiped in spirit and truth? Is Jesus the “I am?” Is Jesus God? Will the Messiah who is to come be a reconciler, rather than a mighty warrior? Imbedded in story is the answer, “Yes!” But this “I am” portrait is just beginning to unfold. The audience does not have foreknowledge of the “I am” statements that are to follow. The telling of the story would not stop for the audience to ponder such a claim: “I am he, the Messiah.” The continuous flow of the story as it was being told did not stop for a re-reading of the text, as would have been possible if the Gospel were a written document. Neither does the audience have the opportunity to flip forward to study the other “I am” statements. The audience experienced the events one after another, becoming a part of the story, with no time for reflection. Their relationship with Jesus grew as the rest of the story continued. When the Gospel story was told well, the audience entered into an evolving relationship with Jesus, based on what they had heard and how they heard it in the story. The wonder and the blessing of story is that each person in the audience heard and experienced it individually, as well as in a group. A fabric of faith would have been knitted together, after the performance, as individuals in the audience would have orally shared their impressions, interpretations and insights with one another. So what did the audience hear, as the story was being told?

#### Story Sound Bites

“ If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” What does the audience hear? Having just heard in Jesus’ discussion with Nicodemus, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son...,” the audience would hear Jesus as the gift.

This is the son whom God had given for the salvation of the world. Jesus is the gift, the source of living water.

Water is essential for life. Identifying Jesus as living water, reveals Jesus as the essence of eternal life. Jesus is the eternal life that gushes up inside. He is a gift given not only for the Jews, but for the world. That includes the Samaritans, who had been disregarded as recipients of God's grace.

The gift of living water could have also been understood as Jesus' teachings. "The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life that a man may avoid the snares of death" (Prov 13:14).

The living water may also have been understood as the Holy Spirit. The expression, "Gift of God" was an early Christian term for the Holy Spirit. In (Acts 2:38), "Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" The gift, however interpreted, is from God and is given to the world by, in and through Jesus.

"The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." Gushing translates the Greek word *λλοματ*. Something that is gushing is dynamic and alive, and maybe even out of control. Gushing is a good term to describe one who has had an encounter with the Lord Jesus. The testimony of the Samaritan woman came gushing out. It is a result of the new life that springs forth, gushing up inside one who believes in Jesus.

The Samaritan Woman begins the story a bit grumpy. Who wouldn't be, going out to fetch water in the heat of the day? After her encounter with Jesus, she returned to the village gushing with her testimony, "He told me everything I ever did!"

So far in the story of John's Gospel, there has been water all over the place. In the prologue Jesus is identified as creator. The familiar Jewish creation stories involved water. Genesis 1 begins with the spirit "moving over the face of the deep." In Psalm 104 the creation story is a litany of water, "You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills, giving drink to all the animals" (Ps 104:10).

At Cana, Jesus changed water to wine, the first of Jesus' "signs of divine power." In the conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus talked about being born again of water and the spirit. And just before the meeting at Jacob's well, Jesus and his disciples were in Judea with John the Baptizer, baptizing.

When John's disciples raised the issue of Jesus' disciples treading on their baptism territory, John said, "I must decrease so that Jesus increases." And then more "insider information" from the storyteller directly to the audience, "It was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized." John and the disciples' baptisms were baptisms of water poured over the baptized for the forgiveness of sin and inauguration into the new age. It was certainly a great and awesome baptism experience. But the baptism may need to be repeated as an act of forgiveness and as an act of repentance. However, the water that Jesus would give is a "spring gushing up inside a person to eternal life." This gift of living water is given on the inside and lasts for an eternity. Jesus' greater gift of water was a sign of the status of Jesus increasing.

Repetition was one of the strategies employed by John in the composition of his Gospel. By repeating stories including water, the audience would stay connected to listen for more water events. Repetition of phrases and themes also helped the storyteller and the audience to stay connected, and to remember.

“Come and see” is a phrase repeated throughout John’s Gospel. The invitation by the Samaritan Woman to the villagers of Sychar was not the first time the audience of John’s Gospel had heard “Come and see,” nor would it be the last. In (Jn 1:45-46), “Philip found Nathanael and said to him ‘We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.’ Nathaniel said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him ‘Come and see.’” The invitation to come and see Jesus is extended by the Samaritan woman to the people of Sychar. At the same time, the storyteller looking into the audience invites them to come and see Jesus. The villagers came to see Jesus at Jacob’s well. The audience is invited to see Jesus in the rest of the story.

There will be others who believe Jesus because they see. There is the man born blind who came to believe in Jesus when he heard and saw the man who had healed him (John 9). And the blindness of doubt expressed by Thomas, concerning the resurrection, was healed by his seeing Jesus’ wounds. Then Jesus said, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” (Jn 20:28-29). The audience will see through the witness of those who saw and tell their story through John’s Gospel. It is an invitation for the audience to continue to come along and see and be blessed in their believing.

One of the other storytelling techniques employed by John is the correcting of misunderstanding. There are examples early in the story, for example, when Nathaniel asks if anything good could come out of Nazareth, and when he meets Jesus, it's as if the Lord had known Nathaniel even before their meeting (Jn 1:48-49). When Jesus is talking with Nicodemus, there is the misunderstanding of being born again (Jn 3:4).

In the episode with the Samaritan woman, a number of misunderstandings are corrected. There is a misunderstanding about the source of living water that Jesus would give and if he is greater than their ancestor Jacob. The water that Jesus gave was not to be drawn from the well by a bucket; rather, Jesus was the source of living water. "The water I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life" (Jn 4:14). So, yes, Jesus is greater than their Jewish ancestor Jacob who dug the well, and so is his water. This well had been a source of water for 1,700 to 1,800 years, if indeed the legend was true, that it was dug by Jacob, son of Isaac and Rebekah, grandson of Abraham and Sarah.<sup>7</sup> Jesus is the source of living water for eternity.

There is also the misunderstanding about the worship desired by God. The Jews thought that worship was centered in the temple of Mount Zion. The Samaritans thought worship was to happen on Mount Gerizim. Jesus said, "The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:23). God is not locked into a temple on a particular mountain. "God is spirit." And as Jesus explained to Nicodemus in the previous episode, the spirit is like the wind. You don't know from where it comes, or where it goes. So it is also with God. God is wherever the

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<sup>7</sup> Bernhard Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament, Third Edition* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Inc., 1975), 602.

spirit blows and not to be hidden behind a curtain in a building made of stone. God is to be worshipped in spirit and truth in all of creation.

There was also the misunderstanding of the Messiah as a victorious warrior. Jesus had come as the great reconciler, whose nonviolent ways bring down the walls that separate people from one another and from God. Jesus' nonviolent acceptance of the cross demonstrated real power. He fulfilled the Messianic prophecies of the suffering servant including the poem in (Isa 52:13-15; 53:1-2). But the audience would have much more story to listen to, before the glorious end and a greater understanding of Jesus as Messiah.

Another misunderstanding was the harvest of God's kingdom. The Jews felt exclusive rights to being the chosen of God. But Jesus demonstrates that the harvest includes the Samaritans as well, not just one, but a whole village. There is great joy in the harvest. Jesus sent out the disciples to enter into the harvest. The storyteller embodying the person of Jesus sends out the audience embodying the disciples into the late first-century harvest.

One final corrected misunderstanding is announced by the townspeople. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world." The witness of the Samaritan woman was the reason for the villagers to "come and see" Jesus. But it was Jesus staying with them so that they could hear his word that led to their knowing. *οιδαμεν* is the New Testament word translated as "know." In John's Gospel, there are examples of *οιδα* meaning an in-depth, intimate knowing. One example is (Jn 7:28), Jesus possesses, "Knowledge of the goal and purpose of His mission, and according to

(Jn 8:55) it takes concrete shape in His obedience to the word and commandment of His Father.”<sup>8</sup> The knowing of the villagers is an intimate knowing. That intimate knowing comes from Jesus staying with them and teaching them.

“And Jesus stayed with them for two days.” The Greek word for “stay” is *μένω*. It is the same word used in (Jn 15) with the vine and branches discourse. *Μένω* in that discourse is often translated as “abide.” It is an intimate “staying.” When the people of Sychar asked Jesus to stay with them, he stayed two days. It is in experiencing Jesus’ “staying” that he is made known in his word.

The audience will experience Jesus staying with them as the storyteller who will give them other opportunities to hear discourses that will reveal Jesus as the Savior of the world. So if the audience hangs around they may come to a knowledge and faith in Jesus that will give eternal life. So as the audience comes to see Jesus, so Jesus stays (*μένω*) with them in the embodiment of the storyteller and the story.

### Conclusion

The starting point of the audience’s relationship with Jesus began with their current situation. Each listener in the audience heard and understood the sound bites of the story based on their knowledge and understanding of Old Testament stories, their personal faith in God, and their cultural norms. This growing relationship with Jesus from the story may have led to one last question, “Will Jesus stay with me, and fill me to overflowing with the living water of eternal life?” The answer would seem simple and straightforward.

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<sup>8</sup> Kittel, volume V, 118.

If Jesus would grant the gift of living water to the Samaritan woman, surely he would grant the gift for me. For the Samaritan woman does not come across as any kind of “holy” person. She is at the well at noon, perhaps to avoid the morning crowd and their gossip about her lifestyle. The audience may have gasped for air, when told that she had gone through five husbands and was working on a live-in. If Jesus can include her into the flow of the water of eternal life, surely each of the Jews assembled would have thought there is a place for me, too. But how can I get some of that gushing water?

John’s story offers two models of coming to faith. The first is a personal encounter with Jesus that would take one by surprise. It happens as one hears Jesus’ promise and comes to an awareness of his divinity. A person of such faith will be given a spring of water welling up to eternal life. The woman at the well got it. She left her bucket behind and gave witness to Jesus as the Messiah, inviting others to “come and see.”

The second model is accepting the invitation and having an initial faith based on another person’s witness. Such a faith would bring one to Jesus to come and to see. After hearing his word that produces *oīða*, one would come to believe in Jesus because of one’s own personal experience.

Both the surprise encounter and the “coming to see” occurred in the telling of the story. The story being told had the power to accomplish the purpose of John’s Gospel. He was interested not only in his audience learning about Jesus, but also a coming to know and love Jesus. The story accomplished that purpose, as it was told in such a way to engage the audience that they would not be simply watching from the sidelines, but drawn into the experience of “coming to see” Jesus, and hearing his word. Through their

interaction with the storyteller and the composition of the story being performed, the spirit of God worked the miracle of salvation.

## CHAPTER 3

### HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

### LUTHERAN MISSIONARY STRATEGIES

The study of the context of Christ Lutheran Church revealed a disproportionately smaller percentage of Millennials as active members compared with the percentage of Millennials living within a five-mile radius of Christ Lutheran Church. The Covenant Group study revealed a need for the congregation to reach out to this younger population in the community. Dawson McAllister identifies the challenge of this outreach ministry in his book, *Saving the Millennial Generation*: “To the Boomers, the Millennials are a foreign culture. To reach these young people for Jesus Christ, we need to employ the principles of foreign missions.”<sup>1</sup> The Lutheran Church has been effective in its foreign missionary work the past two centuries. Two examples are Ewer Ludwig Nommensen’s work in North Sumatra, Indonesia, and Elmer Danielson’s ministry in Tanganyika, East Africa.

Their stories share interesting commonalities: 1) Each man felt a strong sense of God’s call to missionary work, enabling them to endure many obstacles and hardships. 2) They lived among the indigenous people to whom they shared the Gospel. 3) They learned the indigenous religions, myths, proverbs and languages of the people to whom they witnessed. 4) Their ministry efforts included three components: medicine, education

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<sup>1</sup> McAllister, 148.

and telling the Gospel. 5) The key to their success was equipping the indigenous people to be the evangelists, focusing their own efforts on training and administration. 6) They intentionally worked in collaboration with the indigenous people to create a church structure that could be self-sustaining.

This research project was designed on successful Lutheran foreign missionary strategies. Key elements were peer evangelization, biblical storytelling grounded in meaning as experience for faith formation, and recognition of the characteristics of the Millennials who grew up in the new digital culture. The principles of education, witness, invitation, healing and collaboration were important components of both the Lutheran strategy and the development of the research project. The following narratives of the missionary work of Ingwer Ludwig Nommensen and Elmer Danielson are both instructive and inspiring.

#### Missionary to the Batak

In 1844, at age ten, Ingwer Ludwig Nommensen (ILN) was seriously injured when a wagon wheel ran over his leg. Unable to walk, he watched over his younger sisters from his bed, while his parents worked to shelter and feed the family. ILN spent much of his time reading the only book in the house, the family Bible. One day, he came across John 16:23b-24, in which Jesus said to his disciples, “Very truly, I tell you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.” ILN and his mother began to pray for healing. A series of providential events occurred in a few short weeks that led to ILN being able to walk again. He made a pledge to God that he would become a missionary and spread the Gospel among the heathens.

Having grown up impoverished, education was a challenge. But he took advantage of every opened door. It led to Barmen, Germany, where he became a student and was eventually ordained at the Rhenish Missionary Society. In 1861, ILN went to Amsterdam, where he studied under Dr. Neubronner van der Tuuk. Van der Tuuk had spent seven years in Sumatra, through the Bible Society of the Netherlands, to study the language and culture of the Batak people. As Lehmann states “In his report to the society van der Tuuk cautioned against beginning missionary work in the southern part of the Batak territories because of the predominant strength of the Muslim religion in those areas.”<sup>2</sup>

So ILN set sail to North Sumatra, planning to enter the Silindung valley. The boat trip took an exhausting 142 days. Before going ashore, ILN penned a prayer of commitment:

Today, on the thirteenth of April, 1862, on the Indian Ocean I am renewing the covenant which I have made with you, my God and Father, through your son Jesus Christ. I thank you a thousand times for not withdrawing your hand from me on account of my shortcomings and sins. Rather, you have honored your servant above many other human beings. You have made my ear receptive in listening to your voice, which impels me to dedicate myself to you in praise of your name. You have chosen, borne, and instructed me from childhood so that I could become a messenger of the gospel to the heathen. For that reason I am giving back to you my life, my time, my body, spirit, and soul as well as all the strength and all the gifts you have given me.... If I should perchance forsake you, or the devil should mislead me to forsake your way and commit sin, then frighten me day and night.... Strengthen my faith in you, increase my love for you and my fellow human beings, for my enemies, too, and enliven my hope to bear with meekness and patience everything I ought to bear in order that I may spend the days of my life in humility and fear with a pure heart...<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Marti Lehmann, *A Biographical Study of Ingwer Ludwig Nommensen (1834-1918): Pioneer Missionary to the Bataks of Sumatra* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), 46.

When ILN applied for permission from the Dutch consulate to enter into the mainland of North Sumatra, he was denied. Several missionaries had entered that area and did not come back alive. This was partly because they had not learned the language or customs of the Batak and did not listen to the advice of their guides. The Batak people were also known for their violence and unwillingness to give up their independence and way of life. So ILN was sent to Baros, on the northern coast of North Sumatra. He set up a mission station, cared for the sick, began a school and led bible studies and worship services. As the situation in Baros changed, he again applied and was given permission to enter the Silindung Valley.

He was inspired by the valley's beauty. ILN said, "A magnificent view! Here I took time to talk with the Lord and said within myself, 'Here I shall live and die. That was my resolve.' Then in prayer he renewed the covenant he had made with God, 'Whether it means to live or to die, I shall dwell among these people who have been redeemed by you to spread your word and your kingdom."<sup>4</sup> Descending into the valley, he found lodging in the sopo of Radja Ompu Tunggal at Sitnihuta. A sopo was an open-sided shelter used for village gatherings, lodging for travelers and for storing rice. The radjas (village chiefs) asked many questions, often in the form of riddles to find out why ILN had come. They did not trust the Dutch government, so the appearance of a white person raised concern. For six days ILN was questioned. The prevailing Batak attitude was, "We do not feel able to leave our adat (traditions), which have become part of our

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<sup>3</sup> Lehmann, 49.

<sup>4</sup> Lehmann, 96.

flesh. Not one part of this tradition can be changed. But if you will lead us to riches and glory we are ready to receive you and listen to you.”<sup>5</sup>

One day, several local chiefs entered ILN’s hut to provoke him, trying to exhaust his patience. The whole day they pestered him with requests to be entertained. He complied by telling Bible stories and other stories, playing the violin, demonstrating the magnifying glass, and offering them food. At midnight he said, ‘I am exhausted, I have to sleep.’ His unwelcome guests lay down to sleep. In the morning they discovered that they had each been covered with a wool blanket. ILN had sheltered them against the cold.<sup>6</sup>

ILN won over the Batak with his ability to answer their questions. He showed a determination to make Sumatra his home. He also was successful in curing many people with his homeopathic medicines. ILN was granted permission to build a house, though it was swampy land next to the river. Shortly after his first house was built, while ILN was away, some Batak sabotaged the house so that it would collapse and kill him. That day there was an earthquake and everyone left the house before it collapsed. Others tried to poison ILN, but to no avail. His tenacity won great favor among the Batak people. Believing in a form of “fatalism” that everything was controlled by the gods, ILN’s ability to overcome all the challenges was a sign for the Batak that the gods were watching over him. ILN took the opportunity to reveal his God, the all-powerful one.

ILN used his knowledge of the Batak religion to his advantage in sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Batak believed that each person had a tondi (soul-stuff / life-stuff). The tondi determined each man’s fate. Before birth, each man’s tondi would ask

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Pedersen, *Batak Blood and Protestant Soil: the Development of Northern Batak Churches in North Sumatra* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Press, 1970), 48.

<sup>6</sup> Lothar Schreiner, “The Legacy of Ingwer Ludwig Nommensen,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (April 2000), 81.

for a leaf from the tree of life on which his destiny would be written. The tondi of living men, of the deceased, and those still to come were with the high god in the upper world and associated with him in such a way that through the tondi the high god himself was in all men and beings. To remain well and strong, it was a good practice to make occasional offering to one's own tondi.<sup>7</sup> The tondi controlled one's destiny and could grow and be strengthened through cannibalism. By eating an enemy, one obtained that enemy's soul qualities.<sup>8</sup>

When a man died, his tondi left him but remained in the middle world of ancestral spirits and could exercise power over its descendants. Therefore, there were rituals and formulas for appeasing the ancestral spirits (begu). The worship of ancestors was therefore based more on fear than piety and acted as a powerful conservative force in society. Irreverent behavior toward the spirits, such as innovation and departure from traditional customs, prompted immediate supernatural judgment. An outbreak of chicken pox was blamed by the datu (medicine man) on ILN's arrival. A great festival was called to appease the spirit of their grandfather. Two datus acted out the drama, in which the spirit of the ancestral grandfather demanded the sacrifice of a horse. But the village had offered up a water buffalo. After a long dramatic ritual, the lead datu determined that the grandfather would be satisfied with a human sacrifice in addition to the water buffalo. ILN stepped into the circle and asked how many grandfathers gathered would want their grandchildren to be offered up as a sacrifice. None of them responded affirmatively. ILN's conclusion was the datu must be talking to Satan and not an ancestral grandfather's spirit. ILN was then able to talk about a father God who does not demand the sacrifice of

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<sup>7</sup> Pedersen, 26.

<sup>8</sup> Pedersen, 27.

humans, but sacrificed his own son as the one sacrifice for all time. The next day ILN's chief opponent was killed by enemies of a neighboring village, and an unusually heavy rain fell on the area, which were both taken as signs that the "white-eyes" had won and God was on his side.

The Batak were known for their hostility against one another. The radja would settle a dispute with a neighboring village by going to war. To win would demonstrate that the gods had looked favorably on the victor. ILN became increasingly involved in settling disputes as the people began to accept his presence. The Batak began to learn from his witness that Jesus was a man of peace and love, calling on others to love their neighbor as they loved themselves. As this command to love people of various clans and villages began to prove effective in resolving issues of conflict, people began to believe in Jesus.

Even so, new converts were persecuted by their village and family. So ILN built the Huta Dame (Village of Peace). Having built his own village, ILN became a radja and was held responsible for the behavior of his villagers. In 1866, a smallpox epidemic broke out. Dozens of children in neighboring villages died, but none at the Huta Dame. ILN's practice of medicine prompted people to bring their children to him instead of their local datu. ILN reported that, "Nearly my entire congregation is made up of people who have been driven by some external need to turn to the Lord through his word. Their physical misery, particularly their frequent illnesses, became the point of contact for proclaiming the forgiving love and Lordship of Jesus Christ to them."<sup>9</sup> When criticized

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<sup>9</sup> Lehmann, 190.

for all the time he spent treating people's medical needs, he countered that it gave him the opportunity to give 30-40 individual sermons each day.

The Huta Dame also became a place of practicing a strict spiritual discipline. On Sundays, villagers were called to worship by the ringing of the church bell:

The order of worship: a hymn, recitation of the Ten Commandments and the Apostles' Creed, and prayer. This would be followed by a hymn, the sermon, prayer, another hymn, the benediction, and a nine fold hallelujah and six fold amen. After a silent prayer everyone would leave the church. In the afternoons there would be a period for singing hymns, while in the evening a discussion of a biblical text would take place. The Holy Communion was celebrated every three months.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to public worship, ILN made provision for private worship in the home: prayer upon arising, upon retiring, and before and after meals. The bell would be rung at six o'clock and at nine o'clock in the morning, at noon, at three in the afternoon and evenings at six for silent prayer. Each morning, the elders would gather to hear a verse from Scripture upon which to reflect during the day. Evenings at six o'clock children would assemble to read biblical stories previously narrated by their parents. From seven to nine in the evening there would be devotions and instruction of the catechumens attended by all those baptized. At the close of the evening session one of the baptized would pray. Baptized children attended the school in Huta Dame.<sup>11</sup>

As the numbers of Christians grew, the church had to adjust. Not all people could come to the village each day for devotions and at the same time carry out the work to supply their family needs. Travel at night was dangerous because of wild animals. And while people were away from their villages at night, thieves would raid their homes. So

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<sup>10</sup> Lehmann, 173.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 173-174.

ILN created the office of elders, held by indigenous Christians. Every village congregation would elect two or three elders to oversee the wellbeing of the congregations. The elders would gather on Wednesdays at the Huta Dame for bible study and discussion of congregational issues. ILN commissioned the local elders to “gossip the Gospel in the village.”<sup>12</sup> Daily devotions were conducted by the elders as people would gather in homes. As Lehmann states, “On Sunday afternoons three or four men would go out together into the villages to bring the message of God’s word to their relatives. This active involvement of the laity was in a real sense a strategy which ILN himself conceived and developed in effective ways.”<sup>13</sup> As other missionaries joined ILN, they also adopted the same structure, so that it permeated the Batak church.

The church grew one person, one family at a time until a radja would be converted to Christianity. Then the church grew in number equivalent to the radja’s village. One key conversion was Podja Pontas Lumbtbing. He was the grandson of the radja who had refused the Gospel forty-three years earlier. With his acceptance of Jesus as Lord, the entire village became Christian. ILN requested and received more missionaries from the Rhenish Mission Society. This enabled him to move toward his vision of going further inland to the villages of Lake Toba. But in 1878 a major war broke out among the clans in North Sumatra. As a result, the Dutch moved in to colonize the area that included Lake Toba. The Batak leaders of the revolt swore to kill and eat all of the white people. The Dutch armed forces proved too strong and took over the territory. ILN was involved with the negotiations with the radjas. He thought the Dutch would improve the roads, and help maintain peace among warring villages. Because there

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<sup>12</sup> Schreiner, 82.

<sup>13</sup> Lehmann, 193.

was still much hatred toward the “whites,” it became essential to send indigenous evangelists into the area of Lake Toba to proclaim the Gospel.

The missionaries trained evangelists and other leaders. One of the key elements was the training of Christian Batak teachers. ILN developed the idea of a peripatetic teachers’ school. Students would gather at ILN’s home on Mondays for class and Tuesdays for study. Then the students went to another missionary station for Wednesday class and a third station for Friday class. Thus, a missionary only taught one day a week. The curriculum was two years, and the school functioned from 1875 to 1877. Then the teacher training was located at Panarnapitu, led by one missionary. In addition to the basics, there was instruction in certain medical skills. This would make it possible for them to counteract the harmful medical practices of the *datus*.<sup>14</sup>

In 1882, ILN proposed training Bataks for ordained ministry, an unprecedented step in a Dutch colony.<sup>15</sup> The candidates for ministry were selected from the trained Christian teachers. They studied an additional two years and spent six months interning with a missionary. The wives of the students were also given opportunity to study. By 1918, the year of ILN’s death, forty-three indigenous ordained pastors were serving the church.

ILN also created schools for the sons of the radjas. Since sons often followed their fathers’ footsteps and became village chiefs, ILN wanted to teach them how to be effective community leaders. ILN also created schools that taught vocational trades such as cabinet-making and blacksmithing. These vocational skills were taught in addition to reading, writing and mathematics.

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<sup>14</sup> Lehmann, 196.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 197.

From 1878 to 1879, the number of Christians increased from 1,326 to 3,500.<sup>16</sup>

Continued growth would require a new organizational structure for the church. ILN returned to Germany for a furlough in 1880 to spend with family. It was also time to generate support for the missions and the Rhenish Mission Society. In addition to these tasks, ILN developed a constitution and church structure for the Batak Church, basing it not on European models, but on his experience with the Batak people. There was an emphasis on the leadership coming from the Batak. And the church would continue to reach out with the Gospel of Jesus Christ to everyone who was not yet a believer. He returned to North Sumatra in 1881, leaving his family in Germany. It was a difficult decision, but the children remained to continue their education. He would never again see his wife, Caroline, who died six years later in 1887. ILN was dedicated to his calling from God to carry the Good News of Jesus to the heathens. He remained faithful to his promise to God.

The structure for the Batak church was implemented upon ILN's return in 1881. An Ephorus (bishop) was selected by the directors of the Rhenish Missionary Society. (ILN was the first Ephorus and served until his death in 1918.) The Ephorus would be supported by three missionaries. He would have oversight of the whole church and would visit the various districts, including new areas of mission work. The congregation would elect the congregational elder. One elder per twenty families in a mission station, village, would be elected by the heads of families. There would be no more than three or four elders at the larger mission stations. The elders would meet weekly with the missionary for study. Every village with fifty Christian families would be required to erect a school

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<sup>16</sup> Lehmann, 206.

and provide a teacher. Evangelists who had completed the educational requirements for ministry could become pastors. The districts would meet semiannually, and the whole church would meet yearly.<sup>17</sup>

In 1890, there was a continued movement into the Lake Toba area. Native preachers and evangelists were proclaiming the liberating truth of God's word. The peace and good will that the Christians brought was good news to clans constantly at war with neighbors. When entering a new region, ILN would gather the radjas of all the villages and create a four-point agreement. 1) There would be no more war to solve controversies. 2) Gambling for money would not be allowed in the villages. 3) The villagers would protect the Dutch and the Dutch property. 4) The market would be open every seven days, instead of every four days, so that market day would not fall on a Sunday.<sup>18</sup>

In 1899, a mission inspector visited Sigumpar Sumatra, accompanied by ILN. There he preached to a gathering overlooking Lake Toba. Inspector Schreiber reported, "The service this morning was held out-of-doors. I stood on a high, thoroughly ingenious pulpit made of bamboo and palm leaves with a view of the azure lake and the blue, magnificent mountains; before me there were by far more than 1,000 people, all sitting on the ground, a precious church service!" He also commented on the competitive choral singing of the school children in the afternoon. And the day concluded with a lively discussion on the meaning of baptism among twenty-five Batak elders. His statistical report noted that there were 638 elders, eleven evangelists, 167 teachers, and twenty ordained pastors who stood alongside the missionaries on the field. The spectacular

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<sup>17</sup> Lehmann, 214 -216.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 248.

growth of the church was identified as ILN's insistence that each baptized Batak bear witness to their faith among their pagan neighbors.<sup>19</sup>

The 1890 annual conference of the synod met at Balige on the shores of Lake Toba. At the gathering, an independent Batak Mission Society was established. It would be directed by native leadership, with its own treasury. The same year also saw the beginning of a Mission Deaconess program, founded by a wealthy Englishwoman that trained girls and wives of seminary students. In 1900, Dr. Julius Schreider started a hospital in Pearadja. He was joined a year later by two other doctors who introduced modern medical practices and treatments to the Batak.

The statistics from fifty years of missionary work revealed the power of the Holy Spirit in action. There were 103,528 Batak Christians, 11,240 catechumens preparing for baptism, twenty-nine native pastors, 659 teachers, twenty-seven evangelists, and 1,779 elders. There were 27,485 Batak enrolled in 494 schools. Fifty-five missionaries and thirteen deaconesses were serving at forty-one mission stations and their 432 branch stations, which totaled 473 congregations in the Batak Church.<sup>20</sup>

ILN's conviction for his victory in Christ lay at the heart of his witness:

We must speak about the resurrection like resurrected persons, like people who have their most blessed hope in it and about sin like persons who are filled with deep sorrow over it; about our reconciliation like those who have received grace and are reconciled to God, about walking in white robes with the Lord like persons who are already blessed in hope.<sup>21</sup>

In 1883, the chief radja, Singamongaradja, tried one last time to drive the Dutch and the "white" missionaries out of Toba. He had hired Malay troops, soldiers from Atjeh

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<sup>19</sup> Lehmann, 270-271.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 295-296.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 318.

and had secured the following of many radjas. But Singamongaradja was wounded in battle, and it was seen as a sign that his god was weak, and no match for the Christian God. Before ILN's death, Singamongaradja's family became Christian. Though Islam and traditional tribal religion was still strong in other areas of Sumatra, the Toba and Silindung society was so thoroughly Christianized that to be Batak was also to be Christian.<sup>22</sup>

#### Missionary to Tanganyika

In 1928, Pastor Elmer Danielson boarded an American ship in the New York City harbor to set sail for Tanganyika East Africa. The Augustana Lutheran Synod of the United States had accepted the responsibility for the ministry among the 130,000 Iramba people in Tanganyika East Africa. The missionary efforts were threefold: medical, educational, and evangelical. Tanganyika at that time was under the rule of Great Britain. The chief of the Tanganyika tribes was Mtemi Kingo. He had declared himself to be a Muslim because he thought the disciplines of Christianity were more difficult. But as the Christian missionaries worked with him and his people, they discovered that he was really a Christian at heart.

Danielson was assigned to work with the Iramba tribe. In his missionary training, he had learned Swahili. But the language of the Iramba was Kiniramba. This language was oral only, with no printed literature. When Danielson made his first walking safari of his new mission territory, he took with him six Iramba safari companions. Since Danielson did not have a command of the language, he allowed his traveling companion, Yakaboo, to do the talking. In the town of Mmgela, twenty-five

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<sup>22</sup> Pedersen, 68.

people gathered around a campfire to listen to stories about Jesus. At the morning meeting, 150 people gathered. People seemed receptive to the Gospel, especially a number of the old men. That was important because the youth in Africa were often excited about the mission and the new religion, but the old men often were a roadblock.

He next stop was the village of Mtoa. At this village, 160 people gathered in the shade of an enormous tree. They listened to the preaching and teaching for more than two hours. In the village of Uluku, 190 people were gathered to hear the word of God. But this group of people was less receptive to the Gospel. Yakaboo spent less time telling stories about Jesus and more time discussing the merits of Islam and Christianity: “Yakaboo can treat Islam telling, and get his hearers to agree voluntarily. He is an actor and a humorist, besides being an effective evangelist. He knows the minds of his fellow men.”<sup>23</sup>

Danielson decided it was important to learn about the tribal religions. He discovered that the primary god, Tuunda, was the creator god. And many of the tribal people felt that this creator god had abandoned them and left them on their own. They worshiped the sun god Nunza by spitting toward the sun in the morning and in the evening as a personal sacrifice. The more powerful religion was a fear of the spirits of the village people who had died. The medicine men had convinced the people that illnesses, sufferings and mishaps were caused by the spirits of those who died feeling neglected. Therefore, the medicine men would prescribe sacrifices that could be made to appease the spirits. Thus, the peoples’ religion was based on fear and sacrifice. That made them open to the possibility of a God who was present, a God who loved them, a God who is willing

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<sup>23</sup> Elmer Danielson, *Forty Years with Christ in Tanzania, 1918-1968* (Lindsborg, KS: Messiah Lutheran Church, 1977), 8.

to die for them, and a God whose spirit was of holy love. Danielson found that it was important to keep these tribal religions in mind in sharing the good news of Jesus with the various tribes.

Danielson also worked at accumulating a collection of proverbs of the Iramba people. He compiled 125, which he learned from the oral traditions of the elders of the tribes. One proverb is, “I throw my stick into the waterhole. My great one, draw it out for me.” It is a story of the redemption of a young man who killed a man of a different clan. He was sentenced to pay twenty head of cattle or forfeit his life. The young man had no way in which he could pay the twenty head of cattle. As the day of reckoning grew closer, he realized his inability to save himself. He threw a stick into the waterhole, pleading for the great one to get him out. This act demonstrated his helplessness to save himself. The stick was a symbol of the young man, and the waterhole a symbol of death. He called on someone greater than himself to save him. The person who saved him turned out to be his uncle, who came up with twenty head of cattle. This proverb parallels the judgment of those who sin and are set free by the blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross.”<sup>24</sup>

The missionary strategy of the Augustana Synod Lutheran Church was to respect the indigenous leadership and local religion. This was accomplished by using indigenous evangelists who lived with the people. White missionaries also lived among the tribal people. The mission centers were a place for teaching the evangelists. People also came to the mission stations for medical help. The missionary pastors traveled to the various villages to support the native evangelists and to celebrate Holy Baptisms, Holy

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<sup>24</sup> Danielson, 33.

Communion and the Rite of Confirmation. The goal of the American missionary was to work oneself out of a job as soon as possible. A committee of devolution was established in 1929 following seven general principles: 1) The greatest duty of a missionary is to make himself unnecessary on the field, 2) Every effort should be made to put responsibility on the native, even though he or she will often fail to attain or maintain the standard measure, 3) When a new white worker would be called to the field, the board should make a clear list of qualifications for the new person, 4) Medical and educational work are organic parts of building the kingdom of God 5) The departments of the mission work need to work together to achieve devolution, 6) The common source and daily maintenance of the threefold mission must shift from the United States to the native church. 7) Native congregations were educated at every opportunity concerning the importance of the three elements of evangelization: medical, educational, and pastoral.<sup>25</sup>

After Danielson had been on the mission field for ten months, there were 119 people preparing for baptism. Instruction was given from two and a half to three hours every Wednesday and Sunday, which included the Old Testament, the life of Christ, catechism, singing and some memorization. Preaching services were held in outlying villages once or twice every Sunday and sometimes during the week, but the type of evangelism encouraged was hut-to-hut visitation accomplished by the native evangelists.

In 1932, out of 200 catechumens, twenty-three men and twenty-three women were baptized. The men and women came to the classes for various reasons, but the vast majority simply became Christians because their hearts and minds were open to the great love of God in and through Christ Jesus. There was an old man named Pinkina who was

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<sup>25</sup> Danielson, 21-22.

crippled. He overheard a girl who was attending a Christian school, daily praying the Lord's Prayer. He learned the prayer, which peaked his interest in learning more about Jesus.

One of the more effective programs in territories where Islam was prevalent was circumcision camp. The boys came to the camp to be circumcised, and during the three weeks of healing they spent time with elders learning a trade, going to classes, learning stories about Jesus, praying and singing. These camps were patterned after the Islamic circumcision camp, which had more primitive medical processes for circumcision; hence, the camps were much longer and more painful than the Christian camps. The Christian circumcision camps started with seven boys and kept growing as more young men wanted to take advantage of the learning, as well as the more hygienic circumcision.

One of the challenges of dealing with a new religion was the turmoil it caused in families. Some family members did not readily accept this new Christian faith. Some family members disagreed on how this new Christian faith should be lived out. To preserve and enhance family relationships, there was an emphasis on daily family devotions with parents and children.

In 1937, Danielson moved to the Wembere Plaines. At his first meeting of the congregation, Danielson pointed out that each baptized Christian was to be an evangelist. He also made an attempt to show the congregation that its ministry also included serving people through the school, the medical work and building good working relationships with the tribal governments.

The church entered into social ministry with the gold mines in Sekekne. The mines were owned by businessmen in Johannesburg, South Africa, who exploited the

African workers by paying minimum wage and providing few services. The church worked to provide medical care, fair wages, better working conditions, and just treatment of the workers. It was a significant challenge, with the businessmen interested in generating the greatest profit. The church's concern for the miners was one pathway of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ and his saving love.

The missionary work of the Augustana Synod was built on the missionary efforts that occurred in previous years. One of the initial groups was the University Mission founded by the students of Oxford and Cambridge University after David Livingstone's plea that they should direct their attention to Africa. In 1867, the Church Missionary Society was created, followed by the London Missionary Society in 1876 and the Moravian mission in 1879. Several German groups also entered the missionary field, including the Berlin Mission in 1896. In 1891, the Bethel Mission from Germany entered the African mission field, as well as the Leipzig Mission.

Decades later, as the Nazi Party was growing in Germany under Adolf Hitler's leadership, there was a great tension among the German and English missionaries on the African soil. It appeared as though there was a major conflict on the horizon that would involve the entire world. Germany wanted Tanganyika, a colony of Great Britain.

Before his return to the United States from Africa in 1939, Danielson wrote in his diary,

As war clouds loomed closer, I wondered: has man ever reflected seriously on the human suffering caused by war, whether between African tribal nations or between European and African nations or between highly civilized nations such as Germany and Great Britain? No, we are people, still going our foolish way, refusing to surrender our destructive way of life to the Prince of Peace, Jesus!<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Danielson, 44.

After spending a year furlough in the United States with his wife, Lillian, and six children in Lindsborg, Kansas, it was time for him to return with his family to Tanganyika. But the military actions of World War II made it unsafe for international travel, so they stayed in Kansas. The mission field in Tanganyika kept crying out for more missionaries from the United States. When Germany invaded Great Britain, 168 of the 172 German missionaries were dismissed from Tanganyika in retaliation by the British government. That meant that the five mission fields being served by German missionaries were suddenly void of “white” leadership. It meant the closing of hospitals and clinics, as well as schools.

Answering God’s call, Elmer Danielson returned to Tanganyika, leaving his wife and children in Kansas. It was an extremely difficult decision, but he strongly felt God’s calling to the mission work in Africa. It was a long and dangerous trip back to Tanganyika. But when he arrived there was much work to do, as the twenty Augustana missionaries now had responsibility for the five fields of mission that had been served by 172 German missionaries.

In 1941, there was a conference of the Mission Church Federation. There were twenty-five African men to represent the 100,000 Lutheran Christians. They were asked three questions, “Will you accept non-Lutheran missionary staff for your medical work? Will you accept non-Lutheran missionary staff for educational work? Will you accept non-Lutheran pastors?” The unanimous answer was yes to accepting medical missionaries and educational missionaries who were non-Lutheran, but they would not accept non-Lutheran pastors. The strong desire for Lutheran pastors meant that the

Lutheran pastoral missionary staff would need to include and depend more and more on African leadership.

Because of the dismissal of the German medical missionaries, all the hospitals and dispensaries were closed for the war. Dr. Stanley Morris was the only physician in charge of all the medical work covering 5,000 square miles. The educational focus also needed to shift from a highly academic curriculum for the preparation of church leadership to a focus on agriculture. The war was fostering growing poverty. Some of the issues of hunger and starvation could be eliminated if Christian leaders in schools seized the opportunity to teach the youth better ways of dealing with agriculture and personal health. Meeting the needs of the people served not only as an act of love in the name of Christ but also was a direct avenue for sharing the Gospel.

Despite these challenging times, the emerging Iramba-Tutu church grew from 6,841 baptized members in 1941 to 7,500 in 1942. The number of schools increased from eighty-eight to ninety-seven. The Iramba-Tutu church covered a territory of 5,000 square miles, with only six pastors from the United States to serve it.<sup>27</sup>

One of the reasons for the success of the missionary efforts in Africa was the dedication of the missionaries to their sense of call from God to serve in these remote areas of the world. Elmer Danielson left his family in Kansas to return to the mission field and Tanganyika in 1940. In 1941 his wife and six children attempted to join him in Africa by sailing from New York on the ship Zamzam. After arriving in African waters, the Zamzam was sunk by a German raider ship, the Tamesis. Miraculously, none of the passengers on the Zamzam were killed, and they were rescued from the waters by the

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<sup>27</sup> Danielson, 84.

Tamesis. A few days later they were transferred to the cargo ship Dresden, which sailed back to German-occupied France. The return trip took thirty two days. Elmer Danielson heard of the sinking of the Zamzam on the radio and presumed that his wife and six children were dead. He did not find out they were alive until the Dresden had landed in France. Even with this tragic experience, his wife, Lillian, encouraged him to stay in Africa until the Lord's work was done. That would mean another year-and-a-half stay before Danielson would see his family again. Then, after a short furlough in the United States, Danielson and his wife, with three of their children returned to continue missionary work in Tanganyika.

Immediately following the Zamzam episode with his wife and children, Danielson participated in the formation of the FGM committee in 1941. This committee was to supervise the Former German Missions. It marked a significant change in the mission of the foreign missionaries to Africa. One of the primary roles was the establishment of institutional structures that would lay the foundation and the continuance of the sharing of the Gospel in Tanganyika. This would be done primarily by African evangelists and pastors.

One of the main challenges, however, was a lack of education among adult Africans. Most did not have a secondary education that would enable them to succeed in seminary study. Out of necessity, a seminary was created at Machame on Mount Kilimanjaro. Twenty-two men came together for a year-and-a-half emergency seminary training to become pastors of the church. There was also a need for the training of teachers, nurses, and doctors. There was no doubt that one day Africans would be able to govern themselves, but the question was when. The primary role of the missionaries

became that of leadership, training, and administration. The Lutheran missionary schools were recognized as the best schools in Tanganyika. In 1942 the meeting of the Tanganyika Missionary Council saw a need for the mission schools to have a common set of objectives to deal with the government that set the policies for schools. The Missionary Council pushed for religious education in every school. It was important for the various missionary groups to work together as the government's ministry of education had taken over the payment of teachers' salaries. Legally, the churches were supposed be paying 25%, but there was not enough financial support to be able to do so, thus, the foreign missionaries began to work together with the ministry of education of Tanganyika. The Missionary Council pressed toward the goal of devolution by relying on the Africans to become more responsible for their education.

The year 1943 was one of crisis, with famine and hunger engulfing the land as a result of the shortages prompted by World War II. At the same time, there was a growing unity among the African Christians and more people taking instruction for baptism. The growth did not depend on the skeleton staff of missionaries but rather on the outreach ministry of the evangelists who shared the good news of Christ with the villages they served. The FGM worked together to create a church structure and oversight. Often, the meetings had no African pastor evangelists in attendance because the cost and time of travel was great. The "white" missionaries continued to grow in their ministry of administration, while the Africans continued in the work of evangelization.

When World War II ended, Danielson went home for furlough and then returned as superintendent of the Lutheran Church of Northern Tanganyika. At that time, all the buildings and properties owned by the German missionary societies were being held in a

trust. The Augustana mission worked to get those assets entrusted to the native Lutheran Church. Another landmark in 1947 was the opening of a permanent theological school for all of Tanganyika. This would eventually result in the union of all the various Lutheran mission groups.

In the mid-1940s, the board of missions of the United States was preparing to send more missionaries to Tanganyika. When asked the kind of missionaries required, Pastor Lazarus Lasier said, "We need missionaries with much love. Africa's passing through difficult times. The young people are different from the past. Only understanding love, entering into the hearts of the Africans, will give growth to the church."<sup>28</sup>

There was a need for more American missionaries because the indigenous leadership of the church was slow in developing. In addition to the educational factor in the preparation of pastors, teachers and nurses, the Africans lacked understanding and experience in financial matters. The teachers and evangelists had little money, and survived only because of the farms maintained by their wives and family. Africans had little or no experience dealing with financial budgets and maintaining institutions. The Africans had become excellent evangelists but still needed foreign missionaries to teach and prepare the indigenous church to become self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting. One of the blessings that helped the church to grow in its unity was the decision by the national government to adopt Swahili as the national language. This made it possible for the different tribal groups to communicate and work with one another toward building a united church. It also unified education, since all school subjects were taught in Swahili.

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<sup>28</sup> Danielson, 112.

The first native initiative toward evangelization was to the Sonjo people in northern Masai country. Even though there were no external funds available to supply the missionary work, African leaders decided it was essential that the mission field be opened. As Danielson went into the area to be a part of the setup, he began to investigate the tribal religions. He checked in with the medicine men, rainmakers and tribal religious leaders and asked them about the sacrifices made to the spirits of the dead. Each of the twenty people interviewed said, "Don't you know our problems are the modern ones? How can we get more education for our children? How can we get more adequate medical care? How can we improve our roads? How can we get better means of transportation? How can we earn more money to purchase the necessities of life such as better food, beds and blankets for our families? How do we get shoes for our children, sanitary water and toilet facilities, perhaps a radio and more helpful reading materials?"<sup>29</sup>

Times had changed in the twenty years since Danielson first began his ministry with the Iramba people in 1928. The tribal culture had become more modern. The African people longed for the education and the better life that the missionaries had brought to their communities. The missionary leaders had made great strides toward the goal of devolution. One sign of devolution being achieved took place in 1958 at the constitutional assembly of the Lutheran Church of Tanganyika. The Constitution provided for missionaries and indigenous pastors to become coworkers of the Gospel. Two missionaries and two African pastors were nominated for president of the new church. Pastor Moshe received 113 of the 120 votes cast. An indigenous pastor of Tanganyika, Moshe would lead the church into the future. Tanganyika would soon

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<sup>29</sup> Danielson, 121.

become Tanzania. The Tanzanian Lutheran Church would continue to grow and become one of the fastest-growing Lutheran churches in the world.

Early in his ministry in Tanganyika, as Danielson considered the 130,000 Iramba people in his parish, he thought how many whites he had met who considered the task of the missionary a hopeless impossibility: “Truly it is so without faith in the power of God and a vision of Christ with his desire to transform men. The fruit of the mission is a divine miracle. Come and see if God is not working his miracle in Iramba.”<sup>30</sup>

### Lessons Learned

The Lessons learned from these narratives apply directly to the missionary work with Millennials. 1) There will be many obstacles and challenges in reaching out to the Millennial Generation. Liken Danielson and Nommensen, the church will need to have a sense of call to this ministry and a commitment to a process that will be ongoing for an extended period of time. 2) The Millennial Generation is a significant demographic living in the same area as CLC. The church will need to live into relationships with the neighbors which can become the opportunity for invitations. 3) The church needs to learn about the characteristics of the post literate digital culture living in the same neighborhood. 4) Millennials are interested in learning and healing. Biblical storytelling can lead to new knowledge about God and Jesus as the source of healing. 5) The key to success is peer evangelization. The church’s role is training Millennials to tell the Good News stories to their peers. 6) As Millennials enter into this ministry of the church it needs to be done in collaboration with CLC. This collaboration will shape the church to meet both current and future needs of this generation and their children.

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<sup>30</sup> Danielson, 8.

### Implications for the Research Project

The lessons learned from the successful Lutheran missionary strategies of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were applied to the development and implementation of a strategy to evangelize the Millennial Generation. The research project involved a series of seven experiential sessions of biblical storytelling to train a group of Millennials in the art of biblical storytelling. These experiences were both generative for their faith and equipped the participants to be evangelists to their peers.

The project only began to address the question of how Christ Lutheran Church and the ELCA can more effectively communicate the Gospel to Millennials. The project is like a seed, tested to see if it might sprout an answer that can grow into a solution. It is essential that it be understood that this missionary work is a calling from God. There will be many challenges and obstacles along the way. Therefore, this missionary strategy needs to be seen as a beginning with a commitment to continue to revise and strategize into the future.

The research project took into consideration the means of communication of the Millennial Generation, which has grown up in a digital post-literate culture. In this culture, meaning is determined less by reference than by experience. Biblical storytelling is an experiential activity for both the storyteller and the audience of address. When biblical stories are told, there is a connection between teller and audience, which in turn can lead to a connection with Jesus as the story is experienced together.

The research project included an element of education. Techniques of telling biblical stories were explored. Participants learned to use movements with the storyline as a kinesthetic learning method to remember the story. This movement with the telling

of the story also engaged the audience. They also learned a method of biblical study called *Mulling the Biblical Text*, by Tracy Radosevic. The participants were introduced to Performance Criticism as a way of biblical interpretation. This both aided them in preparation for storytelling, as well as became a means for personal biblical interpretation and faith development.

The research project explored biblical storytelling as a means of peer invitation. One question considered was, “In what situations, might learned stories be told to self and others?” Telling a biblical story that relates to a contemporary life situation can be the opportunity for faith sharing. This can lead to an invitation to discover more about Jesus and his church.

Biblical storytelling also has a healing dimension. As one tells and hears the stories of Jesus’ healing in the first century, the Holy Spirit is at work to bring about healing in the contemporary telling. In chapter 2 of his book, *Story Journey*, Thomas Boomershine testifies to the healing power of the story in (Mk 2:1-13). His legs had been injured in an auto accident, and his chances of walking again were slim. Telling himself the story of the healing of the Paralytic during physical therapy brought physical, emotional and spiritual healing. Some participants experienced healing as they told and listen to the biblical stories of healing that connected to their own life stories.

This research project was designed on successful Lutheran foreign missionary strategies. Key elements were peer evangelization, biblical storytelling grounded in meaning as experience for faith formation, and recognition of the characteristics of the Millennials who make up the new digital culture. The principles of education, witness, invitation, healing and collaboration were important components of both the Lutheran

strategy and the development of the research project. This process was only a beginning. Over time, with perseverance in equipping, empowering and encouraging Millennials, biblical storytelling may prove to be an effective missionary strategy for evangelizing their peers.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION**

#### **THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

Having grown up in the digital culture, Millennials determine meaning by experience. An important theological concept revealed in the biblical story, communicated through experience, is the kingdom of God. Jesus began his ministry in Galilee proclaiming the good news of God, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news” (Mk 1:15). Jesus would never give a clear definition of the kingdom of God. He told many parables beginning with “The kingdom of God is like ....” This both revealed and left a mystery concerning the full nature of the kingdom of God. In the coming of the kingdom of God, there will be an end to violence, fear, illness, hunger, war, and futility. There will be a new world order where love rules. The establishment of such a kingdom has proven to be humanly impossible. This kingdom will be realized with the fulfillment of the reign of God over all of creation. Jesus came to proclaim that the kingdom of God has come near.

This kingdom was not a new idea. The concept of the kingdom of God is rooted in the Old Testament stories of the chosen people of Israel. The kingdom of God is a thread that knits the Old Testament narrative together. And the kingdom of God connects the ministry of Jesus to the formation of the New Testament Church, which continues to give identity and inform the life and ministry of the church of the twenty-first century.

### The Kingdom of God Revealed in Old Testament Story

In his book, *The Kingdom of God*, John Bright argues that the kingdom of God is a theological concept that developed over the history of God's people. This development took place as decedents of Abraham and Sarah attempted to understand their relationship with God in the world events that directly affected them. Bright uses the biblical narrative to trace the development, from a chosen people, to monarchy, to a land, to eschatological promise, to a promised fulfilled in the coming of God's Son.

The kingdom of God grows out of the covenant that God had made with Abraham and Sarah, and was called into play with the Hebrew Exodus of the 13th century B.C. Yahweh called the nation of Israel as a chosen people, but not because of any particular quality or character that they possessed. God chose the nation of Israel out of pure divine grace. A pivotal story was God's rescue of Israel from slavery in Egypt via the Exodus under Moses' leadership. The climax was the parting of the Red Sea, so that Israel could pass through on dry land, and the Egyptian army in close pursuit would be swallowed by the sea. God then renewed the covenant, the vision of a promised land flowing with milk and honey. The hoped-for kingdom of God motivated the people to follow Moses into the wilderness to the Promised Land. Despite the grumbling and acts of faithlessness, God proved to be faithful. God created a moral code based on God's gracious act of freeing Israel from slavery. There would be only one God. This monotheistic faith would be the cornerstone of the kingdom. In addition to monotheism, Israel's faith was aniconic: its God could not be depicted or imaged in any form.<sup>1</sup> The God of creation, who had chosen them to be God's people, was also the God of history.

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<sup>1</sup> John Bright, *The Kingdom of God* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), 25.

At the end of history, God and God's kingdom would prevail. With the Sinai covenant, the Ten Commandments was given as the moral code of the emerging kingdom, which was understood as a chosen people under the reign of God, called to inhabit the Promised Land.

The nation of Israel in the Promised Land did not look like a kingdom of any commonly conceived notion. Rather it was a confederacy of twelve tribes living alongside one another. In times of danger God would raise up a judge who would lead the confederacy through the time of crisis. These crises would arise as the people did what was "not" right with the Lord. The notion of a monarchy was intentionally rejected. Yahweh was their king. After two-hundred years or so, the threat of the Philistines was greater than the tribal confederacy believed it could match without a king. The people cried to God for a king like other nations.

Samuel was called by God to anoint the first king. This satisfied the longing of the people of Israel who wanted to be a kingdom, with a king. The first attempt with Saul was a disaster. David, the victorious one over Goliath and a mighty warrior faithful to Yahweh, was chosen as the new king. Though falling into sin several times, David and the kingdom flourished and set the standard by which future kingdoms would be judged. And because David was deemed faithful to God, who had chosen him, the kingdom of God took on flesh and blood as a kingdom of people, in a designated place with a human king. The religion was centralized on Mount Zion, as David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem and housed it in a tent. A state-supported religion had been created. When David's son Solomon became king, he built a lavish temple for Yahweh's

residence. The temptation was to see both the Davidic monarchy and the state of Israel as God's kingdom.

Though a danger, Israel would not equate the kingdom of Israel with the kingdom of God. Despite much prosperity, relative peace and freedom, many found Solomon's rule to be corrupt, and did not reflect fully the ideals of the Sinai covenant. One example was the expansion of the nation through the marriage of neighboring kings' daughters. Solomon allowed them to bring their religion with them. With pagan gods invited into the land, Israel's faith was compromised. Solomon's harem of wives and gods had created a distance between the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of God. Prophets appeared, judging the sins of the kings and of the nation. Great tension arose, and with the death of Solomon, the nation of Israel was divided. No longer could the kingdom of God be identified in the divided nation.

The prophet Amos proclaimed the state was ordained to be the kingdom of God. He pronounced judgment on the nation for failing to fulfill its covenant with God. God had not established an earthly state that was above the law of Sinai. Those societies who considered themselves favored were not only to live under God's judgment but doubly so. And the judgment was history. For a sinful society, Amos saw no hope. John Bright summed up the message of the prophets, "Man's disorder cannot inherit the kingdom of God, but must on the contrary live ever in history's judgment."<sup>2</sup>

So the kingdom of God could not be equated with the nation of Israel. Rather the kingdom rested in the hope of a new destiny under God's reign. This hope was proclaimed by the prophets, along with harsh words of judgment. A remnant of the

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<sup>2</sup> Bright, 69.

people of Israel would cling to the faith of this covenant promise. Through all of the political takeovers by foreign powers, and the oppression and exiles that would result, the remnant held on to their faith. They understood history to be pronouncing the judgment, and Yahweh, the God of history, would ultimately prevail. It was that Yahweh who had chosen Israel, by grace, who longed to reestablish a nation that would live under God's rule in obedience. The prophet Jeremiah boldly proclaimed this future reign in terms of a new covenant:

This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more (Jer 31: 33-34).

The terrible destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Babylonians in 587 B.C. signaled the reign of God could not be confined to a particular geographic location. The hope of the kingdom of God would go with the exiled into the foreign land of Babylon. The ancient stories and prophecies told over and over again enabled the exiled to keep the faith. They did not yield to the ancient understanding that the defeating nation's god was superior to the defeated. Israel understood and trusted in Yahweh, the creator God, the God of their ancestors who had proven faithful from one generation to the next. The Babylonian god Marduk could not stand against Yahweh. Isaiah proclaimed prophetic images of the new covenant and the new exodus. God would work through a Messiah to reclaim God's people and form them into a kingdom once again. And

remembering fondly the days of King David, the Messiah would come from the stump of Jesse, David's father.

The kingdom of God underwent a new understanding. It would be an eschatological kingdom, established at the end of time. The Messiah would take a unique role, that of a suffering servant. The vision was a desert fully blooming, the highway home straight and even a fool could not go astray. The desert would be filled with streams of water. The Garden of Eden would come to life once again. But for now the kingdom of God would be spiritual, rather than resting in a land, a people, or a particular political order. The kingdom of God became the focus of the faith of the people. It was a faith in the power of God, who is the lord and controller of the final outcome of history, and God's kingdom would prevail.

#### Kingdom of God: Future to be Lived into the Present

The prophets envisioned the kingdom of God not as a geographic place, under the rule of a particular monarchy of a particular people. The prophets proclaimed an eschatological kingdom at the end of time. It was a word of hope for the descendants of Abraham and Sarah in times of suffering and political oppression. It was a declaration of God's final act to prove God's faithfulness to the promise of old given to Abraham for protection, property, prosperity, and posterity. It was not only a hoped-for dream of the future, but a vision that could be lived into the present. This present fulfillment, though only partial, was an experience of the kingdom that revealed a certain hope for the future kingdom that was to come.

### The Present Kingdom of God.

In his book *God and Empire, Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now*, John Dominic Crossan argues that the coming of the kingdom of God will be a “Great Divine Cleanup of the world.”<sup>3</sup> It would be a transforming of an evil and unjust earth into a world of justice and peace. It is not the end or destruction of the world, but the end of the era of evil, suffering, injustice and violence.

God will not destroy the earth. Rather God’s creation was all called good by the creator. God’s intent is not to destroy but transform the world once again into the fullness of the kingdom of God. Jesus himself prayed not for the destruction or evacuation of the earth, but that God’s kingdom would come to earth as it is in heaven.

God’s creation is good. It is human culture and community that is the source of evil and violence. Humanity has an addiction to violence to produce and enforce peace. Our present problem is the escalation of violence is so great that the withdrawal associated with the detoxification from violence may only be a little less pain than humanity continuing its addiction.<sup>4</sup> Therefore it may be impossible for humanity to reverse the dilemma it has created for itself. Crossan argues that God’s divine, radical intervention took shape in two popular movements in the first century. John the Baptist movement focused on the imminent kingdom of God to come in an eschatological event. Jesus began a present kingdom of God movement, proclaiming the kingdom of God is at hand.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> John Dominic Crossan, *God & Empire, Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now*, (New York, HarperOne, 2007), 78.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

John the Baptist's movement was based on the Deuteronomic theology that the Roman occupation of Palestine was an act of God's retributive justice for Israel's sins. Therefore the John the Baptist movement involved a washing away of sin in a baptism of repentance. A critical mass of repentant people would hasten the eschatological coming of the kingdom. John's message was about the one who was coming, whose sandals he was not worthy to untie. Crossan argues the fact that John the Baptist alone was executed and his followers were not sought out for extermination is a sign that John's movement was not seen as a violent threat by the Roman authorities. John's message was about an imminent advent of an apocalyptic avenging God.<sup>6</sup>

Jesus was baptized into John's movement of the imminent kingdom. But as Jesus was coming out of the water from his baptism, he received a vision of the coming of the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:10.) Crossan argues at that moment, with the vision of the coming of the Holy Spirit, John's movement was changed from God's imminence to Jesus' movement of God's presence.<sup>7</sup> After John's arrest, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming, "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near" (Mark 1:14-15). The kingdom of God was present – already and not just an imminent future reality.<sup>8</sup> The future imminent kingdom awaits God's cataclysmic act, like a divine bolt of lightning. The already present kingdom of God implies a collaborative work between God and humanity. The Great Divine Cleanup of the world is an interactive process.<sup>9</sup> "It is about

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<sup>6</sup> Crossan, 114.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 116.

the transformation of the world into holiness and not the evacuation of this world into heaven.”<sup>10</sup>

Jesus and his followers accepted and lived out the present kingdom of God. The kingdom was not just a vision or goal but a way of life. “Basically it was this: heal the sick, eat with those you heal, and announce the kingdom’s presence in that mutuality.”<sup>11</sup> The movement was based on sharing with the least as opposed to the Roman greed of the royal life for the elite few at the expense of the poor.

Crossan makes a distinction between healing the illness and healing the disease. The disease is the particular ailment or symptom. The illness is the environment that is manifested in the disease. Jesus did not always heal the disease, but rather healed the environment that caused the disease. That healing could be understood as a framework for a preventive social revolution, revealing the framework of the kingdom of God, the Great Divine Cleanup of the world.

Crossan argues the importance of Jesus’ title as Son of Man. As the Son of Man, Jesus is the one who came to establish a kingdom on earth that will never be destroyed. He is the Son of Man described in Daniel 7, as the one who establishes a new world order. He is the fulfillment of the ancient five kingdom myth, in which the first four kingdoms symbolized by animals would ultimately give way to a lasting new world order. The old world orders were bestial but the new world order is truly human. Jesus as

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<sup>10</sup> Crossan, 117.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 118.

the Son of Man lived out and declared the new world order, kingdom of God. That kingdom is now a collaborative process with God and humanity.<sup>12</sup>

The kingdom of God has come from heaven to earth, and is given over to Jesus the Son of Man and his followers. “It is yet to be revealed in power and glory, but it is already here in humility and service.”<sup>13</sup> It is a kingdom that is experienced through faith, but one day will be present in sight. Until that day, the followers of Jesus, the church, continue to live in the presence of the kingdom of God through healing, eating with those healed and proclaiming the presence of the kingdom at hand.

Such a participatory understanding of the kingdom of God speaks to the Millennial Generation. Collaboration and making the world a better place for all are characteristic norms of the digital generation as discussed in chapter five of this document. This was confirmed by an interview with one of the participants in the research project. He had dropped out of regular church attendance because of the ritualistic nature that seemed to be out of touch with today’s world. But learning and telling the kingdom of God parables drew him to a new understanding of the role of church in society. He said he is concerned with the state of the world: 1) Destruction of the environment with an ever growing burning of fossil fuels destroying the atmosphere and fracking the land, 2) The escalation of violence between nations, religious groups and races, 3) The corruption of government on every level, 4) The disproportionate shifting of wealth to an elite few, 5) Pervasive poverty and hunger globally and locally.

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<sup>12</sup> Crossan, 127.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Learning the kingdom of God parables of Jesus opened his eyes to a new possibility for the church. By living out the kingdom, the church is about healing, eating with those healed and proclaiming a new world order. That new world order is about nonviolence, sharing of the fruits of the earth and proclaiming the kingdom of God for all people. It is a collaborative process between God and humanity revealing the kingdom of God as a present reality. It has the potential to heal the world that is ill from evil, greed, terror and violence. Crossan argues that “this decision is for Christians, to choose between the violent God of human normalcy and the nonviolent God of divine radicality, to choose between peace through violence and peace through justice.”<sup>14</sup>

### A Kingdom of Nonviolence

This kingdom of God is countercultural for most nations of the past and the present. Hughes, in his book *Christian America and the Kingdom of God*, offers this comparison,

Nation	Kingdom of God
Power of coercion and sword	Power of self-giving love
Go to war against enemy	Have no enemy
Concern only for own residence	Concern for all people
Exalt the rich and powerful	Care for the poor
Poor does not count for much <sup>15</sup>	

Figure 4.1

<sup>14</sup> Crossan, 141.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Hughes, *Christian America and the Kingdom of God* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 3.

One way of understanding the four Gospels is to discover how Jesus lived the future kingdom of God into his present day. How did Jesus live and teach in such a way to fulfill his declaration that the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near? The following discussion will investigate Jesus' fulfillment of the prophetic visions of the kingdom in 1) Nonviolence, 2) Healing mercy and justice, 3) All are included, 4) Jesus the Messiah, the Savior.

At one time God's ways involved terrifying violence. An example is Joshua's victory at Ai, recorded in Joshua 8. All people, including women and children, were killed and the village was burned to the ground. The king was saved to view his smoldering village as he was hanging to death from a tree. His body was then buried in the rubble at the gate of the village. Centuries later, the prophet Micah declared an end to war and violence when God's ways would be learned and lived out by all nations. But Brubaker suggests that the Old Testament is a journey rather than a single flat monolithic witness from which one can freely extract certain parts according to one's own interest.<sup>16</sup> Viewed as a journey, the latter destinations have more importance and more authority than the beginning or the middle. War and violent aggression are not part of the prophets' witness of the eschatological kingdom of God, but nonviolence and peace. Jesus living at the end of the Old Testament journey did not live out, nor teach texts such as Deuteronomy 7 or Joshua 6. These teachings were about the annihilation of the enemy that God had given over to the armies of Israel. (Lk 4:16-21) describes Jesus fulfilling a prophetic saying of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to

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<sup>16</sup> Gordon Brubaker, "Just War and the New Community: The Witness of the Old Testament for Christians Today," *Princeton Theological Review* 12, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 19.

bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God" (Isa 61:1-2a). It may be significant that Luke leaves out the prophet's phrase of "vengeance of God," thus signaling a new kingdom of nonviolence.

That does not mean that Jesus was passive in bringing the kingdom of God from the future into the present. Richard Hughes argues in *Christian American and the Kingdom of God* that Luke's Gospel begins with four messengers. Mary, as soon as she learned that she would become the mother of the son of God, announced, in (Lk 1:46-55), that the powerful would be dethroned and the lowly lifted up, the hungry fed and the rich sent away empty. This would be the result of the coming of the son of God. The angels announcing Jesus' birth to shepherds in the field declared the mission of the newborn was peace on earth. John the Baptist declared a reversal of privilege and the need of the privileged to repent. Jesus after his temptation in the wilderness, in which he resisted Satan by trusting in God's word, went to Nazareth to preach. His response to the violence acted out against him was to walk through the crowd and begin a ministry of casting out demons and healing the sick. Jesus had turned the tables on the empires that exploited the people.<sup>17</sup>

God's fulfillment of the promise to bring down the empires of exploitation would be done in a new way. Instead of military action, loving one's enemy, turning the other cheek, going the second mile would be the means of radically forming the new kingdom.

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<sup>17</sup> Hughes, 59.

Jesus would accomplish this through symbolic action and storytelling.<sup>18</sup> Walter Brueggemann suggested the message Jesus proclaimed in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 was an invitation to the imagination of the kingdom of God. And imagination is a danger to the imperial government. Imagination lives the future kingdom into the present. Such imagination brings passion for the needs of others—to care, to suffer and even to die for them.<sup>19</sup>

Jesus' imagination of the kingdom of God for all people is revealed in the parable of the Good Samaritan in (Lk 10). It is told as an answer to the question, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus' response is a surprising story of nonviolence. The first century Jewish audience hearing this parable told by Luke, as well as the attorney testing Jesus, would have been appalled that it was a Samaritan who would stop to help a Jew who was robbed and nearly beaten to death, left lying along the road to Jericho. When hearing that a Samaritan was about to come by the wounded and vulnerable Jew in the ditch, they would have thought the Samaritan would finish him off and take what was left. Jews and Samaritans hated one another. But the Samaritan dressed the man's wounds, took him to an inn and paid for his recovery. Imagine a Samaritan being a neighbor to a Jew. Jesus said, "Go and do likewise" (Lk10:37).

Imagine Jesus meeting a Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob. Instead of ignoring her, Jesus asked her for a drink. This was totally against the ethical norm of the day. As a conversation began, Jesus blessed her with living water, gushing up inside of her to eternal life. The woman told everyone in town, "I just met a man who told me

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<sup>18</sup> Wright, 101.

<sup>19</sup> Brueggemann, 45.

everything I have ever done, he can't be the Messiah, can he?" The entire Samaritan village of Sychar went to meet Jesus. They listened to his word and came to believe that Jesus was the savior of the world (Jn 4:4-42).

Imagine a man so possessed with demons that his name is Legion. He was so powerful that he could break free from ropes and chains. He lived in the cemetery and terrorized everyone who came near. Jesus cast out the demons. When the townspeople came to see what happened, they saw Legion no longer naked, but dressed and in his right mind (Mk 5:1-19). Jesus was about nonviolence, advocating it as a way to overthrow violence. In Jesus, prophetic imagination became reality, as he lived the future kingdom of God into the present. The man believed in Jesus and went home to tell all that God had done for him.

Jesus declared and lived out an emphatic end to violence in the Garden of Gethsemane. According to the story in (Lk 22:47-53), as Jesus was being arrested, one of his disciples pulled a sword and cut off the ear of a slave of the high priest. Jesus said, "No more of this," and healed the slave's ear. Jesus would establish the Kingdom of God not through exercising violence, but through sacrificial love.

As the New Testament church continued the mission and ministry of Jesus, there continued to be acts and teaching of nonviolence. The New Testament book of Acts records several occasions when Peter and Paul were arrested for proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus. Instead of responding violently, they sang hymns, praised God and prayed for their accusers. They converted cellmates and prison guards through their nonviolent acts of faith.

St. Paul's writings include teaching that Christians wage war not with chariots and steel but with God's grace and wisdom.<sup>20</sup> (Rom 12:20-21) is a good example of St. Paul's teaching. "If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." The nonviolent characteristic of the early church was lived out for the first three centuries. The first development of theories of just warfare developed in the time of Augustine (354-450).<sup>21</sup>

#### Kingdom of God: Caring for those in Need

The terms kingdom of God and kingdom of Heaven appear more than 100 times in the New Testament. The kingdom of God is where the powerless are empowered, the hungry fed, the sick healed, the poor sustained and the marginalized are offered peace and justice.<sup>22</sup> This eschatological vision of the future end time was lived into the present through Jesus' teachings and acts of fulfillment. Jesus began his ministry proclaiming, "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news" (Mk 1:15). Jesus was the living evidence that God's future was breaking into the present.<sup>23</sup> The four Gospels give witness to this in-breaking of the kingdom in their stories of Jesus.

The record of Jesus' healing power permeates the Gospels. They identify Jesus as the fulfillment of the prophecies such as (Isa 35:4-6a). "Say to those who are of a fearful

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<sup>20</sup> Hughes, 54.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>23</sup> Wright,100.

heart, ‘Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, and terrible recompense. He will come and save you.’ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.”

When John the Baptist was imprisoned, he sent messengers to Jesus to ask if Jesus were the Messiah. Jesus’ response was for the messengers to go and report to John what they saw happening. What they saw was the blind receiving their sight, the lame walking, the lepers cleansed, the deaf hearing, the dead being raised, and good news being preached to the poor (Mt 11:5). Jesus’ healing was a dramatic sign of God at work to fulfill the prophetic promise of the kingdom. Jesus was, “Turning everything right-side up.”<sup>24</sup> Things were being healed into their intended order and purpose. (Mk 1:32-34) summarizes Jesus’ first day of ministry in Capernaum, saying, “That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and he cast out many demons.”

Jesus also fed the hungry. The feeding of the 5,000 appears in each of the four Gospels. Each has a similar storyline. With no more than a family-sized picnic basket of food, Jesus blessed and multiplied the food to feed 5,000 men, plus women and children. Jesus also told a parable about the importance of feeding and caring for the poor in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Lk 16:19-31). The rich man neglected Lazarus, who regularly was at his door waiting for the crumbs and leftovers. Neglecting Lazarus landed

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<sup>24</sup> Wright, 104.

the rich man in the fiery depths of hell. His condemnation was not on account of his wealth, but his failure to care for the needs of the poor.

The most dramatic parable of Jesus concerning the care for those in need is found in (Mt 25:31-46). Many commentaries focus on this text as the judgment of the nations. But can it not also be a divine imperative of the fulfillment of God's future kingdom in the present? Jesus' expectation of kingdom-of-God people is to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit the imprisoned. Those who receive a reward are surprised because they had not done any of those things to achieve merit. They were living out their identity as God's people. Caring for the least is caring for Jesus and is bringing the future kingdom of God at hand.

The early church continued the practice of healing and caring for the poor. (Acts 3:1-10) is an example of healing. As Peter and John approach the temple, a beggar asked for alms. Peter gave him a greater gift, healing his ankles and legs so he could walk. The once lame man leaped and praised God for this gift of new life. He had experienced the future Kingdom of God in his moment of need being fulfilled. (Acts 6) describes an adjustment made in the early church polity. Seven believers were chosen to manage the food distribution for the widows and the poor in their midst. Healing and caring for the needs of others signaled that the kingdom of God had come near.

## The Kingdom of God: Equity and Justice for All

The kingdom of God stands for equity and justice for all human beings.<sup>25</sup> This justice is especially for the powerless and the poor. This kingdom of God always trumps the violence of the earth with the peace of God.<sup>26</sup> There are many prophetic sayings that describe such an eschatological kingdom.

(Isa 2:2-4) declares an end of war and a retooling of weapons into farming tools. There will be a stream of all the nations who come to God's holy mountain to learn how to live God's ways. The vision not only declares an end of war, but also a coming together as one, a community of all nations following the teaching, living in the ways of God, the ways of God's kingdom. (Isa 11:1-9) paints a vision of peace and harmony among all people that will come about as the result of the coming of the "stump of Jesse." (Isa 25) describes a great banquet on God's holy mountain. It is a gathering of all nations. The shroud that has separated people and nations from one another will be destroyed. (Ezek 34) talks about a great roundup of God's scattered people. God the true shepherd will gather all who have gone astray to the ends of the earth. And (Ezek 36) describes a restoration of the nation and all people as a way of revealing God's holiness. Jesus lived and taught this eschatological future into the present.

Jesus even included children in the kingdom. He said, "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it" (Mk 10:15). Jesus included women, tax collectors, prostitutes, demon possessed, lepers, and Gentiles in his gathering

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<sup>25</sup> Hughes, 32.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

of people for the kingdom of God. One of those was an unnamed woman who anointed Jesus with expensive oil while he was eating at a leper's house. Jesus said, "She will always be remembered for her act of mercy" (Mk 4:3-9). Jesus went to the house of the tax collector Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10). Zacchaeus had only wanted to catch a glimpse of Jesus. But Jesus invited himself to Zacchaeus' house. Jesus declared salvation for Zacchaeus and his household for, "He, too, is a descendent of Abraham." As such, he was an heir to the promises of God. As a result of his encounter with Jesus, Zacchaeus gave half of his great wealth to the poor.

Jesus also taught about the roundup of those who would be in the kingdom. (Lk 15) records three parables about the lost, including the parable of the lost sheep. In his book, *Poet and Peasant*, Kenneth Bailey dissects the parable and shares his knowledge of ancient Near East culture to provide interesting insights into the parable. As Jesus addresses the Pharisees, he assumes they are a part of the shepherding crew and would naturally go out looking for the one who was lost. This was a scandalous thought for them, as they were concerned only with the righteous, like themselves. But the work of a true shepherd would include not only finding the lost, but restoring the lost. And the restoration of the lost was cause for a great community celebration.<sup>27</sup> There is no mention of the ninety-nine "righteous ones" being part of the celebration. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the lost son returns to a community celebration. But the son who had stayed at home and done his father's bidding, though invited, did not attend the

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<sup>27</sup> Kenneth Bailey, *Poet and Peasant* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1983), 147-148.

celebration. “It seems as though a party is going on, the kingdom of God, and all the wrong people are there!”<sup>28</sup>

Jesus lived out the inclusion of all into the kingdom to the very end of his life. As he was hanging on the cross, he heard the plea of one of the criminals being crucified with him and said, “Truly you will be with me in paradise” (Lk 23:43). And for the crowd gathered who was crucifying him, Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them” (Lk 23:34). For Jesus, the kingdom of God was for all. Jesus said, “I, when I am lifted up, I will draw all people to myself” (Jn 12:32). Jesus taught and lived into his present the eschatological vision of the kingdom of God being for all people.

The early church discovered the scope of the kingdom for all, as it lived into its witness of Jesus as Lord. In (Acts 10), Peter learned that the good news of Jesus is for Gentiles as well as Jews. When he went to the house of Cornelius, who was a Gentile, Peter told the story of Jesus, and Cornelius and his whole household believed, received the Holy Spirit, and were baptized. Later Paul was commissioned to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. To the Galatians, Paul wrote that all who are baptized are one in Christ. “There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. And if you belong to Christ then you are one of Abraham’s offspring, heirs to the promise” (Gal 3:28-29). The early church, including Peter and Paul both taught and lived the vision of the future kingdom into their present. That kingdom was for all.

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<sup>28</sup> Wright, 103.

### The Kingdom of God: Jesus as Savior

Christianity is not so much about new moral teachings. Though Jesus had new insights, his morality was grounded in the ancient law of love of God and love for neighbor. And Jesus' life was not about being a wonderful moral example to serve as a role model. Trying to emulate such an example would cause anyone who tried to give up in despair. Nor was Jesus about giving the world new information about God. The Old Testament is full of evidence of God's mercy, grace and steadfast love. Primarily, Jesus was about the fulfillment of God's promise of a savior for humanity, "that was lost and in need of being found, stuck in the quick sand and waiting to be rescued, dying and in need of new life."<sup>29</sup>

"Jesus is the climax of the story of Israel, as he has fulfilled the promise of finding, freeing, rescuing, and giving new life. The whole point of Jesus' work was to bring heaven to earth and join them together forever, bringing God's future into the present and make it stick there."<sup>30</sup> And when heaven comes to earth and finds earth unready, when God's future arrives in the present while people are still asleep, there will be an explosion.<sup>31</sup> It started with the birth of Jesus. Herod felt threatened by the newborn king of the Jews. He sent soldiers to kill all the young children in Bethlehem to kill this new king. After Jesus' baptism, Satan tempted Jesus to come to his side. After Jesus' first sermon in Nazareth, his hometown, the town folk tried to throw Jesus off a cliff. When he healed a man with a withered hand in the synagogue, Jesus received the wrath of the

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<sup>29</sup> Wright, 92.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

religious leaders for healing on the Sabbath. These explosions continued all the way to his death by crucifixion. And when everyone thought it all clear, there was one last explosion in the form of a great earthquake that rolled away the stone sealing Jesus' tomb, revealing it to be empty. Resurrected life had exploded from the tomb into all the world, for all time.

As Matthew tells his Gospel story, more than thirty times Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of old as the Messiah. Though he was not the political figure the Jews expected, Jesus fulfilled God's promise of a Messiah, a Savior. Jesus described it in his late-night conversation with Nicodemus, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but that it might be saved through him" (Jn 3:16-17). Peter was the first to confess it, "You are the Christ" (Mk 8:29). After Jesus' sentence of crucifixion, the soldiers derided him and mocked him as King of the Jews (Mark 15:18). But when the crucified Jesus breathed his last breath, the centurion guarding him said, "Truly this man was God's son" (Mk 15:39).

The future kingdom of God could initially be brought into the present solely by God. The saving act was one of reconciliation and freedom. "For in Jesus all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross" (Col 1:19). "For freedom Christ has set you free" (Gal 5:1). "With Jesus, God's rescue operation has been put into effect once and for all. A great door has been swung open in

the cosmos which can never be shut again.”<sup>32</sup> Jesus has brought the Kingdom of God into the present, and invites all to enter into the kingdom of God that is at hand.

### The Church and the Kingdom of God

As the followers of Jesus, the church continues the Lord’s mission of proclaiming in word and deed that the Kingdom of God is at hand. “The church brings what is hidden into view as a sign and into experience as a foretaste of the kingdom of God”<sup>33</sup> The church is not fully the kingdom of God, but the church represents the kingdom of God. It does so as a community that works for healing and justice, a community of nonviolence and shalom, a community that testifies that Jesus is Savior of the world, and a community that is welcoming for all. The representation is both passive—its characteristics are seen by those on the outside of the community and activity—and active, as the church is involved in making known the kingdom in the world through word and deed.

The church represents the kingdom of God when it is a community of shalom expressed in “God’s dynamic of wholeness and harmony.”<sup>34</sup> The word community literally means coming together as one. The church is a coming together of God’s forgiven people who live out a sense of harmony and nonviolence. When those outside the church witness that sense of harmony and mutual love of “God’s peculiar people, they in a real sense have caught a view of the kingdom of God.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Wright, 92.

<sup>33</sup> Darrell Gruder, *Missional Church, A Vision for the Sending Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 102.

<sup>34</sup> Diana Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us* (New York: HarperOne, 2006), 110.

<sup>35</sup> Gruder, 104.

The church is not, however a perfect representation of the kingdom of God. In his book, *Antagonists in the Church*, Kenneth Haugk raises the issue of people in the church whom he calls antagonists. These are people who “go out of their way to make insatiable demands, usually attacking the person or performance of others.”<sup>36</sup> Such attacks can be brutal and relentless. “Conflict in the church that hones the edge of organization and keeps it mindful of and true to its purpose is healthy.”<sup>37</sup> But antagonism in the church is unhealthy conflict. When those who look at the church from the outside see a lack of harmony and shalom, they do not catch a glimpse of the kingdom. Such antagonism can consume energy that the church could more effectively use to do the work of the kingdom of God in the world. It is important that the church deals with conflict in a healthy way that leads to shalom and harmony. It is important to recognize antagonists that would create dissention in the church so that a sense of harmony and wholeness can be restored to the community.

Bass states that, “Harmony is the overcoming of division, hatred and discord; the mending of what is displaced and broken”<sup>38</sup> Harmony does not come about by ignoring conflict and differences of opinions. But harmony and wholeness comes by working through the issues in a restorative nonviolent way. This becomes a paradigm for the church and society to work through differences of opinion, prejudice, and hatred in a way that eliminates violence.

<sup>36</sup> Kenneth Haugk, *Antagonists in the Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1998), 21-22.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>38</sup> Bass, 104.

Thomas Merton suggests that, “Nonviolence is perhaps the most exacting of all forms of struggle, not only because it demands first of all that one be ready to suffer evil and even face the threat of death without violent retaliation, but because it excludes mere transient self-interest from its consideration.”<sup>39</sup> The church does not exist for its own institutional wellbeing or continuance. The church, following the example of Jesus, exists to represent and bring the vision of the future kingdom of God into the present. Like Jesus, the church exists to love one’s enemies and pray for them. The church is called even to sacrifice its life for the sake of the world.

As the church lives a life of nonviolence working for harmony and shalom in the community of faith and in the world, it represents the kingdom of God. “There can be no question that unless war is abolished the world will remain constantly in a state of madness and desperation.”<sup>40</sup> The church that can live into a community of harmony and shalom becomes a paradigm for the world. The church may not have all the solutions to the violence in the world, but the church has the vision of the future kingdom of God as guide and goal.

The church is called to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God. That good news is about God’s steadfast love and mercy. It is that good news that now and in the end God reigns. The proclamation is not about asking a question to solicit decisions for Jesus to enter heaven. The good news for today, as in the time of Jesus, is “The time

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<sup>39</sup> Robert Inchausti, *The Pocket Thomas Merton* (Boston: Shambhala Publications Inc., 2005), 172.

<sup>40</sup> Inchausti, 175.

is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the good news" (Mk 1:15). The future kingdom of God has broken into the present in Jesus.

Jesus invites us into a relationship with God that is filled with endless joy, peace and life. "The God of whom Jesus spoke has always been looking for partners, people who are passionate about participating in the ongoing creation of the world."<sup>41</sup> When the Gospel is centered on a question about getting into heaven, it is reduced to a ticket. The Gospel is not about "getting in"<sup>42</sup> but about living the kingdom-of-God life in this present world. It is a life filled with joy that is overflowing, to be shared with others. The expression of proclaiming the Gospel takes place in telling the biblical story. "It is as we experience the Gospel happening in the life of the biblical story that the Gospel also happens to us."<sup>43</sup>

So the church tells the stories of Jesus forgiving, healing, and raising to new life the real people that he met. In the telling of the stories, the hearers in the present meet Jesus and can experience the life-giving power of his love. The church also tells the parables Jesus told about the Kingdom of God. Parables are told for the kingdom cannot be fully explained nor understood. Yet the kingdom of God in Jesus comes near in the church's telling of the biblical story. "Proclamation is the goal and not understanding."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Rob Bell, *Love Wins* (New York: HaperOne, 2011), 178.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Jensen, 80.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 73.

Announcing the kingdom of God is a spontaneous expression of the gratitude, humility, and joy of those who experience it. The proclamation of the kingdom of God is the church's invitation to all, "It's free! This community is open. You are welcome!"<sup>45</sup>

The church not only proclaims the kingdom of God that is at hand but also lives it out in acts of healing, mercy, and justice. Acts of mercy reach out to the community caring for the immediate needs of others. This may include food for the hungry, clothing, and other personal items needed for living. Mercy can take the form of financial assistance to provide housing, medicine, or education. Mercy can go global with mission trips and contributions to meet the needs of those who live in third-world poverty. Mercy and justice is practiced in support groups who care for those experiencing personal crises.

Working for justice also involves dealing with the issues and causes of poverty and unfair practices. This is no simple undertaking. "Doing justice goes beyond fixing unfair and oppressive structures. Doing justice means engaging the power and transforming the inner spirit of all systems of injustice, violence and exclusion."<sup>46</sup> Walter Wink goes further to say that, "The powers that be are not then simply the people and the institutions... they also include the spirituality at the core of those institutions and structures. If we want to change those systems, we will have to address not only the forms, but the inner spirit as well."<sup>47</sup> Doing justice, reaching out to confront and bring about systemic change is an overwhelming proposition for an individual. But a

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<sup>45</sup> Gruder, 107.

<sup>46</sup> Bass, 161.

<sup>47</sup> Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 4.

community of faith, the church, possesses the resources to make a difference. It begins with the future vision of the kingdom of God, where all injustice is thwarted. The church then lives that kingdom into the present to affect present conditions and realities of injustice. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America explains the mission in this way, “God’s Work—Our Hands.” Diana Butler Bass puts it this way, “We are the hands and feet of Christ.”<sup>48</sup>

Alongside the work of mercy and justice is the ministry of healing. Healing shares a common purpose with injustice and mercy of bringing about God’s shalom in the lives of people and the community. Healing is one way in which the present reality of the kingdom of God is made known. “Jesus embodied healing for creation and for individuals.”<sup>49</sup> The church also embodies the healing power of Jesus. The Acts of the Apostles include stories of healing. The history of the church reveals a strong component of healing in making the Kingdom of God known. The 20<sup>th</sup> century mainline protestant churches in Europe and the United States turned to a strict adherence to the secular world view of putting one’s faith for healing in the medical sciences. In the present post-literate digital culture the church is recovering its ministry of healing. Healing of a person’s body as well as soul has become an important sign of God’s reign in the present age, which is a foretaste of the ultimate healing in the future kingdom of God.

This community of nonviolence and shalom that proclaims the good news of Jesus as Savior and Lord, whose works for healing, mercy and justice, represents the

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<sup>48</sup> Bass, 161.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 111.

Kingdom of God only when it is for everyone. Such diversity is, after all, a foretaste of heaven and God's dream for here and now.<sup>50</sup> Such a church will include people of various cultures and races, people of various levels of income and social status, people of various levels of education and vocational skills, people of various sexual orientations and ages, people of various digital competencies. Isaiah 25:6-9 paints a vision of the final reign of God to be a great banquet where all the barriers that separate people one from another, that great shroud will be torn top to bottom. Where the church expresses such a diverse community, the kingdom of God is at hand.

In reality, many congregations often reflect uniformity, rather than diversity. The congregation can become a gathering of people making up the community of the saved. The life of righteousness is lived for the purpose of a future salvation on the last day. Such a community can become exclusive, open only to those who are "like us." A congregation that represents the kingdom of God that is at hand becomes the point at which heaven and earth overlap, where God's future and the present come together.<sup>51</sup> This understanding of the kingdom of God recognizes that it is not fully in the present, yet it is not far off. Jesus came to reshape humanity. This new humanity is not lived in exclusion of "sinners." Nor is this Christian life lived to earn God's favor or obey a long list of ancient rules. The Christian life is about practicing in the present, the tunes we shall sing in God's new world.<sup>52</sup> And it is God's desire to not have any voices missing from the choir. The new humanity created by Jesus is that of family, brothers and sisters

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<sup>50</sup> Bass, 156.

<sup>51</sup> Wright, 217.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 222.

in Christ and heirs of the kingdom of God. So it is the calling of the church to be God's kingdom people, which is to include each and all.

### Conclusion

Jesus once said, "The kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" (Mt 13:44). The kingdom of Heaven or the kingdom of God is a great buried treasure revealed in Jewish history and the history of the church as a promise continuing to be fulfilled by God. The 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C. exodus of Israel from Egypt is an example. The people believed in Moses' vision of a new destiny in a Promised Land flowing with milk and honey. After settling the Promised Land, the kingdom rested in the people of the twelve-tribe confederacy, with God as king raising up judges when crises arose. The kingdom nearly got lost as the Davidic monarchy, but prophets such as Jeremiah and Isaiah held up a new vision of the kingdom that was spiritual in nature and rested not in a geographic region but a kingdom to come. It would be like a new exodus, a new Eden. Jesus, the Son of God, was born as the son of man. He declared the kingdom to be near. Through his ministry of nonviolence, healing, and justice, and being the Savior for all people and God's creation, Jesus lived the future vision of the Kingdom of God into his present world. As the church began, it lived in the tension between the kingdom of God that is near and the eschatological kingdom to come. The church is not the kingdom of God, but represents the kingdom. As a loving community, the church is a sign of the kingdom. As the church performs acts of healing, mercy and justice, the kingdom of God is experienced in the world. As the church proclaims the Gospel message that Jesus is Savior and Lord, the kingdom as treasure is revealed for all to receive it as a gift of God's

grace. The invitation is for all to enter into the new life of the kingdom of God that has broken into the present through Jesus and his church. People who dwell in the brokenness of this world crave healing and wholeness, justice and peace. That longed-for reality is to be found in the kingdom of God that is at hand and the kingdom of God to come. This kingdom has been a great treasure throughout the history of God's people. This kingdom of God that breaks into the present digital culture through Christ and his church can be a treasure for the new generations coming to faith.

## CHAPTER 5

### THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

#### MILLENNIALS

The calling of the church, given by the Great Commission of Jesus in Matthew 28:16-20, is to make disciples of all nations. One could understand that “all nations” also includes “all generations.” The ELCA faces the challenge of making disciples of the Millennial Generation by more effectively communicating to them the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Millennial Generation can be defined as those born between 1980 and 1991.<sup>1</sup> Who are they? How are they different than the generations before them? Can biblical storytelling be a medium for communicating the Gospel that can be generative for creating and nurturing faith in the Millennial Generation?

In the United States, the Millennial Generation is second in size to the Boomer Generation. Compared with older generations, the Millennial Generation is more ethnically and racially diverse. 43% of millennial adults in the United States are non-white.<sup>2</sup> A major factor is the large number of Asians and Hispanics who have immigrated to the United States in the last fifty years. This diversity has led to more racial and religious tolerance. It may also explain the Millennial Generation being more politically liberal than the previous generations.

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce Drake, “6 New Findings About Millennials,” Pew Research Center, March 7, 2014, accessed March 9, 2014, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/03/07-new-findings-about-millennials>.

## Influences that Shaped the Millennial Generation

In his book, *Virtual Faith*, Tom Beaudoin says that each generation has been influenced by key historical and cultural events that took place while they were emerging into adulthood. He suggests that for the Silent Generation, that event was World War II. For the Baby Boomers, the Viet Nam War and the Civil Rights movements were formative. For Generation X, he argues it was largely formed by the Pop Culture of that time, music, fashion, movies, cable television and the introduction of the Internet. The greater influence of Pop Culture was due to no wars or other dramatic historical events taking place during the time Generation X was reaching adulthood. They were also the first latchkey generation, spending afternoons alone after school watching TV until their parents returned home from work.

The Millennial Generation, however, has experienced a multitude of major events in their emergence to adulthood. September Sept. 11, 2001, was the first foreign attack against the United States on the mainland in recent times. Muslim extremists carried it out. It was the beginning of the War Against Terror, with no easily identifiable enemy. It also confronted the United States with the reality of the presence of Islam worldwide, including in American neighborhoods. The war against terrorism led to the military invasion of Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban and Osama bin Laden, leader of Al Qaeda. This would prove to be the longest military action in the history of the United States. The United States, with European allies, also invaded Iraq in a preemptive measure to defeat Saddam Hussein to eliminate Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction—weapons that proved nonexistent. Questions were raised about U.S. intelligence as well as ulterior motives for the attack. Despite the military actions, only

2% of Millennials are military veterans, compared with 6% of Generation X, 13% of Baby Boomers, and 24% of the Silent Generation.<sup>3</sup> In 2009, just 38% of Millennials agreed that peace is best achieved through military strength. For previous generations, 45-60% were in agreement with the role of military strength in achieving peace.<sup>4</sup>

The Millennial Generation also was strongly influenced by the child sex-abuse scandals in the Roman Catholic Church. Pedophilic priests who had been reported to their bishops were reassigned to other parish settings, where they continued their predatory behavior. Although this had been happening for decades, it was during the emergence of the Millennial Generation that the public was made aware, and lawsuits with huge settlements ensued. At the same time, television evangelists preached a theology of prosperity, selling millions of dollars of products telling how God will make contributors wealthy. Some television religious personalities were caught living in luxury funded by their viewers. Scandals in government and church tainted Millennials' trust in individuals and institutions. According to a 2010 Pew Research study, Millennials are less trusting of others than older Americans. Just 19% of Millennials say most people can be trusted, compared with 31% of Generation X, 40% of Boomers, and 37% of the Silent Generation.<sup>5</sup>

All those factors have contributed to the fact that Millennials have fewer attachments to political and religious institutions. In a March 7, 2014, Pew Research

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<sup>3</sup> Taylor, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>5</sup> Drake, 6.

studies, 29% of Millennials claim no religious affiliation, and 50% consider themselves to be politically independent.<sup>6</sup>

The economy, likewise, has significantly influenced the Millennials. Corruption and careless speculation on Wall Street led to the closing of large banks and investment firms. The housing bubble burst, and many people lost their homes to foreclosure. The resulting recession of 2008 caused a high rate of unemployment. As the Millennials entered the workforce, factory jobs were scarce, with lower entry-level wages being agreed to by labor unions. Many college graduates were unable to find employment in their field of study and competed for poorer-paying factory and service industry jobs. As Paul Taylor observes, “68% of Millennials say they are not earning enough money to live the kind of lifestyle they want. But 88% are optimistic that in the future they will earn enough to live the good life.”<sup>7</sup> The Millennials are also burdened with high debt from student loans. Therefore, 13% of adult Millennials are living with their parents, more than previous generations. Another 15% of Millennials cohabitated with friends or with a potential spouse.<sup>8</sup> The percentage of Millennials married at the same age as previous generations was lower, partly because of their inability to earn enough to support a family. They have come of age at a time of economic recession in the United States and around the world. That has made it more difficult for Millennials to find full-time employment. According to Smith and Aker in their New York Times article “*Millennial Searchers*,” this has changed their life focus from pursuing happiness to living a life of

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<sup>6</sup> Drake, 6.

<sup>7</sup> Taylor, 47.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 51.

meaning.<sup>9</sup> Social scientists have defined a life of meaning as a cognitive and emotional assessment of the degree to which we feel our lives have purpose, value, and impact. Seeking happiness leads one to focus on self and accumulation. A life of meaning and purpose leads to an interest in others and giving to others.

Millennials emerged into adulthood at a time of social upheaval as well, with the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual movement coming of age, forcing American society to deal with issues of sexual orientation. Some communities and states enacted fair-treatment laws. The issue of same-gender unions or marriages and the ordination of gays and lesbians also challenged the church. Some denominations were open, while others judged homosexuality as sinful and blasphemous. Conservative Christians worked to ban same-gender marriage through local, state and federal law, based on their interpretation of the Bible and natural law. While the older generations were divided over the issue of same-gender marriage, the Millennial Generation looks positively on gay marriage. 21% of Millennials strongly favor gay marriage, and 29% view it favorably.<sup>10</sup>

Millennials are more open and tolerant of differing behaviors in marriage. In addition to gay marriage, Millennials are favorably open to biracial marriages. They are also open to couples living together, and not being married. In 2007, 40% of all U.S. children were born out of wedlock, compared with 11% in 1970.<sup>11</sup> Only 61% of Millennials grew up with both parents.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps that is one reason they are in agreement

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<sup>9</sup> Emily Esfahani Smith and Jennifer L. Aaker, "Millennial Searchers," *New York Times*, November 30, 2013, accessed March 9, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/01/opinions/Sunday>.

<sup>10</sup> Taylor, 62.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 53.

that a growing number of children being raised by single mothers is a social concern. Millennials place a high value on family and get along with their parents better than previous generations. Having a successful marriage and being good parents are high priorities for Millennials.<sup>13</sup>

Yet another key influence in the lives of Millennials has been the development of a digital culture, representing a new era in communication. It is the first major transformation of communication since the literate culture developed as a result of the invention of the printing press by Gutenberg in the late 1400s. An example of the enormity of this change can be seen in the fact that in the year 2000 there were no iTunes downloads. By 2012, there had been ten billion.<sup>14</sup> In the Pew Research Study of Millennials, the one thing that makes the Millennial Generation unique is the use of technology. 88% use a cell phone to text. 64% admit to texting while driving. 75% have created a social networking profile.<sup>15</sup> 75% of Millennials feel new technology makes life easier. In 2010, 75% of Millennials were using social-network sites.<sup>16</sup>

### The Digital Generation

Don Tapscott describes the effect that being digital has on the Millennial Generation in his book, *Grown Up Digital*, influencing how they think, act and live. He suggests that potential employers and those who would sell to Millennials pay attention

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<sup>13</sup> Taylor, 18.

<sup>14</sup> Phyllis Tickle, *Emergence Christianity, What Is It, Where Is It Going, Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 2012), 27.

<sup>15</sup> Taylor, 25.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 28.

to eight norms that govern their behavior: freedom; customization; scrutiny; integrity and openness; entertainment; collaboration and relationship; speed; and innovation.<sup>17</sup>

*Freedom.* Millennials have grown up with multiple choices. They have had nearly unlimited choices in home entertainment with satellite TV, online moves and the ability to create their own music playlist. Millennials enjoy flexible workspace and schedules. With many jobs being computer dependent, Millennials often prefer working from home. They would rather be paid according to work performance than the number of hours they sit at an office desk. High-performance Millennials average 2.6 years tenure at their job.<sup>18</sup> They are unwilling to commit to a job or schedule, preferring to be open and prepared for the next new opportunity that comes along.

*Customization.* Millennials are quick to customize whatever they have. They will customize a cell phone with individual ring tones for each contact. They will customize their electronic devices with an assortment of apps. They will customize their clothing to fit their preference or image. They will customize their job and job descriptions if given the opportunity. Customizing is their way of life.

*Scrutiny.* Millennials have grown up identifying spam. They are experts at recognizing online claims that are too good to be true. They have the availability to check out all claims by going online. Almost two-thirds of Millennials search for information online about a product that they intend to purchase.<sup>19</sup> The research includes claims made by the seller and the reviews of previous purchasers, as well as the experiences of their

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<sup>17</sup> Don Tapscott, *Growing Up Digital* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2009), 34-36.

<sup>18</sup> Tapscott, 74.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 80.

online acquaintances. Therefore, a marketing strategy to the Millennials needs to have easy access to information for review and scrutiny.

*Integrity.* Millennials check the integrity of the service or merchandise provider. They want their provider to have similar values and beliefs as their own. They will check to make sure a provider has acted in accordance with their value and belief statements. Such integrity is important to Millennials because they have seen corporate, political and church leaders involved in corrupt and immoral behavior. Millennials demand openness with integrity that can be validated.

*Collaboration.* Digital connection with others is a way of life that is learned at a young age. Millennials play video games online with others across town and around the world. They blog their daily events on Facebook and Twitter. They connect with online friends for consultation in decision-making. Tapscott says that it is possible to maintain 150 face-to-face relationships. But digitally it is possible to maintain 700 relationships or more.<sup>20</sup> The norm of collaboration is carried over into education. Millennials collaborate with teachers by doing their own research study online. Millennials also expect this norm of collaboration to carry over into other aspects of their lives, including employment. They desire to work with, instead of work for, a supervisor.

*Entertainment.* Millennials become bored easily. They demand a certain level of fun in whatever they do. Enjoyment can come through interactivity in work, play, and communication. Products offered to Millennials need to be both useful and fun to attract their attention.

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<sup>20</sup> Tapscott, 198.

*Speed.* Millennials grew up in an instant world. They ate instant oatmeal and drank instant hot chocolate. They waited only seconds for meals to come out of the microwave. Instant messaging has developed its own shorthand to make sending and receiving text messages even more instantaneous. Millennials have acquired the skill of multitasking, which speeds production exponentially. Millennials like instant feedback on the job. They expect an instant reply to text messages. When things move too slowly, they get bored or move on to something else.

*Innovation.* Millennials are always on the lookout for the newest technological device. They are reluctant to sign a contract that locks them in to a long-term commitment. They expect to switch to the next new thing. That new thing can be a digital device, digital game or job. They enjoy being a part of creating new ways of doing things, new environments at work, or setting up new social networks. Millennials are not interested in being told, “This is the way it is.” They are interested in collaborating to make the next discovery.

Growing up digital affects the way that the mind thinks and operates. Tapscott cited as an example a gathering of some of the top U.S. surgeons to learn a new robotic surgery technique. The seasoned surgeons had a more difficult time performing the procedure than the less experienced Millennials. The success of learning the procedure was determined not on knowledge, but one’s ability to play video games. After ten days of playing the video game Medal of Honor, the seasoned surgeons improved in their ability to perform the new procedure.

Millennials are called “digital natives” by a Pew Research Study titled “Millennials in Adulthood,” published March 7, 2014. According to the Pew study, “88%

of Millennials are on Facebook, with a median friend count of 250.”<sup>21</sup> 55% of Millennials have posted a “selfie” on a social-media site. In this 2014 study, Six in ten Boomers did not know what a “Selfie” was, even though “selfie” was declared the Oxford Dictionary “word of the year” in 2013.<sup>22</sup>

Not only Millennials, but also previous generations have become a part of the digital culture. For older generations, this has not been a “natural” progression but has taken intentional effort to transition from a literate to a digital culture. Resources of knowledge and statistical information, though recorded in paper documents, are more easily accessed digitally. Paper mail has a unique physical quality to it. Email, fax, and social media have become a preferred method of communication because of their speed and versatility. This move toward a digital world has sparked the next great era of human history.

### The Digital Reformation of the Church

Phyllis Tickle in her writing about Emergent Christianity suggests that there is a great transformation or reformation every 500 years. Zero C.E. was the emergence of Christianity. Christianity spread throughout the known regions of the Mediterranean after the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem around 70 C.E. Christianity significantly affected individual communities and local governments. An institution called the church emerged to normalize the basic statements of faith and the scriptural canon upon which the norms and creeds were founded. Around 500 C.E., the decline and dissolution of the Roman Empire resulted in the Dark Ages. With it came the emergence of monasticism.

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<sup>21</sup> “Millennials in Adulthood, Detached from Institutions, Networked with Friends,” Pew Research, March 7, 2014, accessed March 9, 2014.  
<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/03/07/millennials-in-adulthood>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Around 1000 C.E., the great schism between the Western and Eastern worlds evolved. The separation was more than religious. Emerging from the schism was an authoritative church in Rome. The Roman Church was a key player in all aspects of life, education, politics, and the economy. Around 1500 C.E., a great Reformation took place, growing out of the invention of the printing press. As the culture became more literate, a middle class developed from the feudal system. There was a great Protestant Reformation in the church. The Roman Catholic Church was no longer the only Christian expression in the Western world.

Now that the second Millennium of the Common Era has come, the world, including the church, finds itself in the middle of another great reformation. And the church, being a part of the fabric of the culture, is challenged to transition to the digital age. There will be those who will live on in the ways of the past. But for a church to thrive, it must find a way to effectively communicate the Gospel to the Millennial Generation and the older generations who have been claimed by the new digital culture.

The church is called to reach to all generations. As Psalm 100:5 announces, “For the Lord is good and God’s steadfast love endures forever and God’s faithfulness to all generations.” Statistical studies indicate that the Lutheran Church has not been effective in communicating the good news of the love of God to the Millennial Generation. In Louisville, KY, five of the fifteen ELCA congregations are on the verge of closing. Those congregations near death have few young adults, with a majority of members more than 65 years old.

Pew Research from 2010 states that 25% of Millennials are unaffiliated with a religious organization.<sup>23</sup> This compares with 19% in the previous generation. In 2014, the unaffiliated has increased to 29%.<sup>24</sup> 66% of Millennials say they are members of a Christian denomination, with 43% being Protestant, compared with the previous generation of 81% associated with a Christian faith and 53% Protestant. 18% of Millennials were raised in a religion but became unaffiliated by choice.<sup>25</sup> Of the Millennials who are affiliated with a religious organization, their affiliation is as intense as previous generations. 37% of Millennials say they are strong members.<sup>26</sup> In a 2012 Pew survey, 86% of Millennials said they believed in God, but only 58% said they were certain that God exists.<sup>27</sup> If the past is any indication of the future, the Millennials may grow in their belief in God. However, the church is called to be proactive in declaring the existence, love and faithfulness of God to all generations, and not leave it to fate.

Barna Research has identified six reasons Millennials leave the church, according to its September 28, 2011, study, “*Six Reasons Young Christians Leave the Church.*” 1) Churches seem overprotective. Their experience is that the church is fear-based, focused on the sins of the world and not dealing with the real problems of the world. 2) Christianity is shallow. They say church is boring. They see no relevance between their faith and everyday life. 20% of young adults who grew up in the church said God seems to be missing from church. 3) Churches come across as antagonistic to science. Churches

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<sup>23</sup> Taylor, 86.

<sup>24</sup> Pew Research, “Millennials in Adulthood”

<sup>25</sup> Taylor, 88.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>27</sup> Pew Research Center, “Millennials in Adulthood.”

presume to know all of the answers, and yet are out of step with present-day science. Creationism verses science has been a big turnoff. 4) The church's position on human sexuality is often simplistic and judgmental. With marriage being put off until the late 20s, Christians are as sexually active as non-Christian peers. Millennials feel the church's demand of chastity, along with the Catholic position on birth control, are outdated. 5) They wrestle with the exclusive nature of Christianity. Living in an eclectic culture of diverse religious expression, Millennials are hard-pressed to accept Christianity as the only true faith. 6) The church feels unfriendly to those who doubt. Millennials are fearful to ask their most pressing questions about life.

Barna Research Group has also identified five reasons that Millennials stay connected to the church. These grow out of the complexity of the world in which Millennials find themselves living. They look for guidance that comes as a result of the church listening to their situation and a willingness to address the needs with depth. 1) Make room for meaningful relationships. 55% of Millennials who stayed in church had a close personal friendship with an older adult who served the role of mentor. 2) Teach cultural discernment. Millennials desire the skills to discern cultural decisions from a Christian perspective. They want to find ways to practice their faith in daily life. 3) Make reverse-mentoring a priority. Millennials want to be taken seriously. They want older generations to notice and respect that they have much to offer the church. 4) Embrace the potency of vocational discipleship. Millennials need to discover that their talents and passions are gifts from God. Hence the calling of God is to utilize these talents and passions daily in work, play and relationships to bring honor and glory to God. 5) Facilitate connections with Jesus. More than assisting in life's complexities, the

Millennials are looking for a more intimate relationship with Jesus. As the Barna group reports, “Millennials who remain active are more likely than those who dropped out to say they believe Jesus speaks to them personally in a way that is real and relevant; 68% say yes, versus 25% no.”<sup>28</sup> Jesus has been compartmentalized in the church, and Millennials need to discover how Jesus is connected to each situation in life.

In her CCN Belief Blog, July 27, 2013, Rachel Held Evans, herself a Millennial, listed some wants of the church,

Time and again, the assumption among Christian leaders, and evangelical leaders in particular, is that the key to drawing twenty-somethings back to church is simply to make a few style updates, edgier music, more casual services, a coffee shop in the fellowship hall, a pastor who wears skinny jeans, and an up-scaled website that includes online giving. But here’s the thing. Having been advertised to our whole lives, we Millennials have a highly sensitive BS meter, and we’re not easily impressed with consumerism or performances.<sup>29</sup>

Many Millennials are being drawn to churches with “high church” liturgies. The ancient forms of worship are unpretentious, unconcerned about being cool and are refreshingly authentic. When done well, this is what liturgy is all about. It is telling the story of Jesus in a way in which those gathered experience Jesus in their midst and grow in an intimate relationship with Jesus.

Evans lists some things that Millennials want from the church: an end to cultural warfare, calling a truce in the warfare between science and faith. Millennials want to be

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<sup>28</sup> Barna Group, “5 Reasons Millennials Stay Connected to Church,” September 17, 2013, accessed February 18, 2014, <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/5-reasons-millennials-stay-connected-to-church#.VLE56pUBjo>.

<sup>29</sup> Rachael Held Evans, “Why Millennials Are Leaving the Church,” CNN Belief Blogs July 27, 2013, accessed February 18, 2014, [religion.blogs.cnn.com/2013/07/27/why-millennials-are-leaving-the-church](http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2013/07/27/why-millennials-are-leaving-the-church).

able to ask the important questions of life that do not have predetermined answers. Millennials want to discover what Christianity stands for. Millennials want churches that emphasize an allegiance to the kingdom of God over the political dimensions of the American culture. The church needs to welcome all people, with love and respect, including people of all cultures, races, and sexual orientation. Millennials want to be challenged to live lives of holiness and righteousness. Barna Research has concluded that the church can help Millennials generate a lasting faith by facilitating a deeper sense of intimacy with God.<sup>30</sup>

In the past, the Lutheran church has relied on its doctrinal teachings to generate faith. Since Martin Luther wrote his Small Catechism in 1529, adults and youth have memorized the seven articles of faith and their meanings. Youth also learned important Bible verses. The hymnody of the church was based on doctrinal and theological concepts developed in four to seven stanzas of poetry sung to classical music. Preaching has been based on a theological and doctrinal interpretation of a lectionary of biblical readings. The biblical passages were read to ensure a word-for-word correctness in the presentation. The liturgy of worship was defined as the “work of the people.” Bible study materials addressed the scriptures from a scholarly, historical critical approach. The theory was that knowledge and correct understanding will produce faith.

This approach had been somewhat effective for the faith development of previous generations. But the Millennial Generation requires adjustments so that the Lutheran Church can more effectively communicate the Good News of Jesus. The literary

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<sup>30</sup> Evans.

approach has not proven to be as effective with those who have grown up in a digital culture.

### A Reformation Via Biblical Story

One possible approach to introduce Jesus to Millennials is the oral telling of biblical stories. Walter Ong suggests that in oral communication, sound is power.<sup>31</sup> As a biblical story is read silently, one receives only the literary meaning of the words. But when a voice is added, as in telling a biblical text, there is also hearing, which adds a new dimension to the story. The hearing creates a sensory experience that can make the story come alive. And the listener becomes a participant in and with the story being told. The text moves from being an intellectual exercise to an experience. This is how the biblical texts were intended to be performed.<sup>32</sup> In theory, to recapture the scripture as story can potentially change the church, change the faith of an individual, and change the world.

A society's stories serve as interpreters giving the meaning of life. In tribal culture in India, the meaning of sickness may be explained in stories that describe how an angered deceased relative causes illness.<sup>33</sup> When people hear different stories to explain the same reality, as they believe the new stories, they are able to throw off the restraints of the old stories. This process can result in new understandings of life and generate faith. By changing the stories, one can change the traditional meanings and beliefs about life.

In his book *Virtual Faith*, Beaudoin claims that Generation X has been shaped by the Pop Culture in its understanding of life's values and norms for living. The sources

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<sup>31</sup> Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London: Routledge, 1988), 31-33.

<sup>32</sup> David Rhodes, "Performing the Letter of Philemon (lecture, Network of Biblical Storytelling Festival Gathering, 2007), 9.

<sup>33</sup> Paul Koehler, *Telling God's Story With Power: Biblical Storytelling in Oral Cultures* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2010), 50.

have been the stories of movies, cable television programming and music. As the digital culture has evolved, so has the visual and oral communication informing the Millennial Generation. Movies are available in a growing number of formats. Cable television seems to have limitless programming, with the option of “on-demand” viewing. Online, there is a YouTube video for about every topic imaginable. Interactive video games enable users to be a key player in the virtual story that unfolds. Skype, Google hangout and face-to-face options on iPhones make literary communication potentially obsolete.

Written forms of communication such as texting and tweeting have taken on oral characteristics. Walter Ong in *Orality and Literacy* identifies the use of simple sentences and frequent phrases as characteristics of oral communication.<sup>34</sup> To these, add acronyms that represent fuller expressions of thought and you have twitter and texting. The Millennials who have grown up in the digital culture seem to communicate in ways that relate more to oral story forms than literary doctrinal forms.

Oral story forms have been used throughout the generations. Jesus told stories to communicate the good news of the kingdom of God that is at hand. N.T. Wright suggests that in his stories, “Jesus invited his listeners into a new world, making the implicit suggestion that a new world view be tried on for size with a view of permanent purchase.”<sup>35</sup> For example, the parable of the Good Samaritan invites listeners to consider putting the needs of a neighbor before their “religious and ethnic purity.” And the neighbor is someone who is in need, no matter who he or she is. The story gives the listener an opportunity to imagine what this new understanding might be like for him or

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<sup>34</sup> Richard Jensen, *Thinking in Story* (Lima, OH: CSS Publishing, 2010), 20-21.

<sup>35</sup> NT Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 77.

herself and for the larger community. Buying in to the story can transform one's life and the world in which one lives.

Stories function as complex metaphors that consist of bringing two ideas close together, close enough for a spark to jump, but not too close, so that the spark in jumping illuminates the whole area around, changing perceptions as it does.<sup>36</sup> The spark is imagination and invites the listener to discover new truth and understandings. This collaborative effort between storyteller and listener creates a dynamic situation for faith discovery and growth.

Telling stories also has the ability to engage one's emotions, as well as speak truths about life. Paul Koehler has discovered, "That which engages the emotions is often far more transformative than a single statement of faith."<sup>37</sup> An example is the story in 2 Samuel 12. Nathan confronts King David, who had Uriah murdered in order to have his wife, Bathsheba. A direct confrontation with the facts could have meant the same fate for Nathan. Instead he told David a story about a rich man who took a poor man's only sheep that was a family pet. The rich man butchered the sheep for a royal dinner, rather than take a sheep from his many flocks. When David became angry over the travesty, Nathan informed David that he was the man. David had judged himself, and it led to his confession and repentance.

Telling biblical stories can draw the teller and the listener into the emotion of the story as they experience it together. Max McLean writes,

The Bible is meant to touch us in the deep recesses of our troubled souls. We may not comprehend all that it is saying to us. But it clings to our innermost being and

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<sup>36</sup> Wright, 40.

<sup>37</sup> Koehler, 57.

won't easily let go. At the end of a storytelling presentation many of the comments are about not what was learned but rather what was felt. The Bible is not just a book to read. It is a book to experience.<sup>38</sup>

This is possible as the listener connects with the various characters of a biblical story. These characters provide examples of how the scriptural truths may be acted out. As the listeners connect with a character, there is an intimate involvement that can intrigue and inspire. In Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15, the story plays out the truth about God waiting and looking for the return of those who have gone astray and are lost and alienated from God. When the younger son returns, there is a great welcoming, a return to the status of son and a grand community celebration. The older son, trying to earn his father's favor by living righteously, is lost from his father by not joining the celebration. In one's time of feeling alienated from God, the parable becomes an invitation to go home and to join in the celebration of life. Bryan Warnick describes this model of imitation as 1) description of an examples' action, 2) description of the results of the actor, and 3) an exhortation to do what the example did.<sup>39</sup> For those who connect with such characters, the story is more generative than a simple statement about God forgiving everyone who returns.

The power of story is described by Walter Hollenweger as he describes the growth phenomenon of the Pentecostal Church worldwide,

In the pre-literate, semi-literate or post-literate cultures the medium is just as in biblical times: not the definition but the description, not the statement but the story, not the doctrine but the testimony, not the book but the parable, not the

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<sup>38</sup> Max McLean, "Why I Love the Bible: An Interview with Max McLean," The Listener Bible 2000 accessed April 15, 2003, [http://www.listenerbible.com/cgi-bin/merchant2/live\\_events.asp](http://www.listenerbible.com/cgi-bin/merchant2/live_events.asp).

<sup>39</sup> Bryan Warnick *Imitation and Education: A Philosophical Inquiry into Learning by Example* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), 55.

systematic theology but a song, not the treatise but a TV program, not the circulation of concepts but the celebration of banquets.<sup>40</sup>

This does not mean that systematic theology or a carefully created statement of belief is unimportant. Doctrines and treatises explore and interpret the various elements of faith. But they are not the place for entry into faith formation for those who are new to the Christian faith. Faith formation begins with the stories of God. The stories of God give both a basic knowledge of God and an experience of God. As Koehler describes his experience in his missionary work in India, “As pre-Christian people listen to biblical stories, they can identify with characters that experience God’s saving action. They can believe that God acts and loves on their behalf.”<sup>41</sup> This leads to faith and a loving obedience to God and God’s way of living.

The crucial link is the listener’s ability to connect with the story and its characters. The wonder of biblical stories is their ability for people to connect with them throughout the centuries. There is something about these stories that becomes the avenue for the Holy Spirit to create faith. The story becomes even more impactful when the teller has integrated it into the teller’s own life. This takes place as one learns to tell the story to others. The more familiar one becomes with the story, the more it is a part of the teller’s faith and life. The story told is no longer an ancient narrative, but it also becomes the teller’s story. It becomes a story of testimony.

This becomes possible through one’s own discovery, which leads to revelation and a growing faith. Discovery is one of the wonders of storytelling. Paul Koehler

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<sup>40</sup> Walter Hollenweger, “Charismatic Renewal in the Third World: Implications for Mission, *“Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research”* no. 2 (April 1980), 69.

<sup>41</sup> Koehler, 76.

suggests “Truth which you tell me is your truth. Truth that I discover for myself is my truth.”<sup>42</sup> The discovery begins as one hears the story being told. The discovery continues and evolves as the story is discussed with others. The discovered truths take on new dimensions as one tells the story to others. The discovered truth empowers one to share the story and one’s own faith.

Thomas Boomershine has argued that, “When our/my story is connected appropriately with the story of God, there is revelation. It is a sacramental moment when ordinary human reality discloses the presence of God.”<sup>43</sup> An example is the declaration of the messenger at the empty tomb on Easter morning. To those who come to the tomb, he says, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? Jesus whom you seek is not here. He is risen” (Lk 24:6). A person visiting the grave of a loved one feels a sense of emptiness, different from previous visits. Then the resurrection story is remembered and is experienced, “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” The moment of grief is met with the certain hope of the resurrection for all who die in Christ, including the loved one whose grave was being visited.

People come to faith through cognitive knowledge and also experience.<sup>44</sup> Biblical storytelling enables the listener and teller to experience the story together. In the story event, they discover the truth of the story and experience its power.

Paul Koehler states, “To be an effective Christian witness in any culture it is essential to follow a system of theology that is suitable to the context.”<sup>45</sup> In oral cultures

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<sup>42</sup> Koehler, 61.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Boomershine, *Story Journey: An Invitation to the Gospel as Storytelling* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 106.

<sup>44</sup> Koehler, 82.

it begins with biblical storytelling. People learn about God through connecting with characters in the story. As God has cared for those in the story, the listener begins to see how God cares for her or him and begins to piece together a theology made up of the stories that were most inspiring.

Is it possible that biblical storytelling can work in a similar way for Millennials in the digital culture as it has for other non-literary cultures? Can biblical stories meet the needs and wants that the Millennials have of the church? Can biblical storytelling be a medium for them to meet the Jesus for whom they long? Does biblical storytelling fit as an effective medium of communication in a digital culture? Can recovering liturgy as story, rather than the work of the people, be a worship format that inspires faith for Millennials? The sociological dimensions of the Millennial Generation and the dynamics of biblical storytelling form a compelling match. It is important for the Lutheran Church to explore biblical storytelling as an effective way of communicating the Gospel of Jesus.

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<sup>45</sup> Koehler, 84.

## CHAPTER 6

### PROJECT ANALYSIS

Can Millennials, learning with their peers to tell biblical stories by heart about Jesus and his teachings, experience growth in faith and be equipped, empowered, and encouraged, to invite others to “come and see” Jesus? The phenomenological method of this research project is derived from (Jn 4:5-42). In that biblical story, a Samaritan woman comes to faith as she meets and talks with Jesus at Jacob’s well. As a result of her experience of Jesus, she went into her own village, told her story, and invited others to “come and see” Jesus. In a six-session biblical storytelling course, Millennial participants will experience Jesus via biblical stories learned and told by heart. They will use elements of performance criticism as a new paradigm for learning, understanding and preparing to tell biblical stories. The process for learning and telling biblical story is outlined in *Story Journey an Invitation to Gospel as Storytelling* by Thomas E Boomershine. As a result of this six-week course, participants will experience Jesus through storytelling, grow in their faith and be encouraged to share their faith and stories of Jesus with others both within and outside the study group.

The phenomenological method of qualitative analysis was utilized to gather and interpret data to discover if this ministry model achieved its goals of helping Millennials to grow in their faith through biblical story, and as a result become peer evangelists,

sharing the gospel with other Millennials. Four instruments of evaluation were utilized. A survey was administered, before and after the course to determine any change in spiritual discipline that may have occurred during the six-week period. A group interview, based on the group's experience, determined how the five theses of anticipated outcome were met. An individual interview with a sample of participants was conducted using similar questions as the group interview. The fourth mode of evaluation was evaluative observations concerning the participants made by the facilitators.

### Project Development

This model of ministry was designed to meet the growing need in mainline churches to more effectively reach out to the Millennial Generation with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Millennial Generation is unique. It is the first generation that has grown up in the post-literate digital era. The parallels between digital communication and storytelling indicate that biblical storytelling may be a meaningful method in which Millennials can hear and receive the Gospel of Jesus and share it with their peers. The history of foreign missionary strategies in the Lutheran church indicates an emphasis on peer evangelization. Therefore this ministry model has adopted a foreign missionary strategy for sharing the gospel with Millennials. Among the theological issues most meaningful to Millennials, is the issue of the kingdom of God that is at hand. So the biblical stories that were offered as choices for the Millennials to learn and tell were parables about the kingdom of God, stories of Jesus in which he lived out the future kingdom of God into his present situation, and the resurrection of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. A phenomenological method of qualitative analysis was utilized to gather and

interpret data from the project. The experience of the participants was analyzed to affirm or deny the validity of the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1:* The experience of preparing and telling biblical stories by heart with peers can result in a growth in faith in Jesus.

*Hypothesis 2:* Using the paradigm of performance criticism to study the stories of Jesus and his teachings can lead to new insights and understandings.

*Hypothesis 3:* The encounter with Jesus in telling biblical stories by heart can equip, empower and encourage faith sharing.

*Hypothesis 4:* Preparing to tell and telling biblical stories with peers can create a supportive faith community.

*Hypothesis 5:* A six-week experience of biblical storytelling can provide the foundation for a future biblical storytelling ministry within the congregation.

The ministry model was also in compliance with the “Five Reasons Millennials Stay Connected to Church” from Barna Research: 1) Meaningful relationship with older mentor; 2) Find ways to practice faith in daily life; 3) Practice reverse mentoring with Millennials collaborating in ministry development; 4) Embrace the potency of vocational discipleship; 5) Facilitate connection with Jesus.<sup>1</sup> The older mentor was the facilitator. The discussion after the biblical stories were told centered on the use of the story in daily life, considering in what situation to tell the story to self or to another. The Millennials chose the stories to learn and tell, and collaborated on potential future uses of biblical

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<sup>1</sup> Barna Group, “Five Reasons Millennials Stay Connected to Church.”

storytelling for themselves and the church. One goal of telling biblical stories is to become familiar with the stories, so that they become one's own story of an experience of Jesus.

### The Setting

The ministry model was implemented at three sites: Christ Lutheran Church in Jeffersontown, Kentucky; Christ the King Lutheran Church in South Bend, Indiana; and Jeffersontown Christian church in Jeffersontown, Kentucky. Each site offered its own opportunity for evaluating this ministry model. Each pastor has been serving his congregation for at least seventeen years. The researcher is a regular biblical storyteller at worship on Sunday mornings, at educational events, and for pastoral care visits. Pastor E in South Bend and Pastor G in Jeffersontown are not regular biblical storytellers. They are interested in discovering what biblical storytelling might mean for their ministry. Pastors E and G served as professional consultants for the researcher.

Christ Lutheran was chosen as a site, as the home congregation for the researcher. Five members of the congregation participated in the project. One of the participants had to resign after the second session for health issues. The participant's range of age was twenty five to thirty two years old. They had each participated in the confirmation instruction and youth ministry programs at Christ Lutheran Church during their teens. The participant who resigned from the project is a weekly worshiper. Participant O works in retail most weekends, which makes Sunday worship impossible. Participant I attends worship monthly. Participants E and S attend Sunday worship approximately three times per year. The spouses and significant others of the participants are not active members of

a church. The biblical storytelling course met on Wednesdays from 7:00 P.M. to 8:00 P.M. at Christ Lutheran Church. The average attendance for the six sessions was three and one half. Three participants contributed to the focus group interview. The four who completed the course were each interviewed individually. The researcher was the facilitator for the biblical storytelling course.

Christ the King Lutheran Church in South Bend, Indiana was chosen as a site because the congregation was exploring programs to provide faith formation and discipleship for young adults. The six participants, ranging in age from twenty five to thirty three, met on Mondays from 7:00 P.M. to 8:00 P.M. in a comfortable meeting room at the church. Pastor E also attended as an observer. He extended invitations, recruited the participants, and coordinated scheduling and childcare. The participants included two married couples with children and two single adults. Before the first meeting, the participants had not formally met. They had come responding to a personal invitation from Pastor E, inviting them to a biblical storytelling course for Millennials. The average attendance for the six sessions was five participants. Four participants were involved in the focus group interview, and one participant in an individual interview. On two occasions when a participant was not able to attend in person, that person attended by face-to-face digital connection. The researcher was the facilitator for the group. The researcher met with the group in person for the first session and for the focus group and individual interviews at the last meeting. The researcher, using Skype, facilitated the biblical study course. There were some technical issues with the first session, but the remainder of the sessions went very smoothly.

Jeffersontown Christian Church used the project for their weekly young adult Bible study. The group met in the church library on Wednesdays from 6:30 P.M. to 7:30 P.M. Initially there were seven participants, with one person resigning after the first session, not wanting to tell biblical stories publicly. The other six participants included two married couples, the spouse of the participant that resigned and a single seminary student. The average attendance for the six sessions was five, with three participants involved in the focus group interview at the end. All of the participants knew each other well, having grown up in the congregation and were regular participants in the young adult Bible study. Pastor G served as the facilitator for the group. The researcher met with the group for half of the first session to get acquainted and to introduce the course. The researcher met weekly with Pastor G reviewing the previous week and preparing for the next session's activities. Before the course, the researcher met with Pastor G to introduce the paradigm of performance criticism, the uniqueness of the Millennial Generation, and techniques for learning and telling biblical stories. The researcher met with the group for the last session for the focus group interview. Pastor G, serving as facilitator, added a variable to the research that significantly influenced the outcome of the Jeffersontown group. But it provided insight into how the course would need to be crafted for use by facilitators other than the researcher.

The course began with a learning activity to discover the power of story as a way to get to know one another. Every participant was asked to tell two stories about themselves. At least one of the stories was to be true and a second story could be a lie. Stories enable us to become acquainted with one another. In like manner, stories are the way one gets to know Jesus. The paradigm of performance criticism suggests that the

biblical stories were originally created for the purpose of oral telling. Therefore the stories will be learned and told orally as a way to get acquainted with Jesus and grow in faith. The art of biblical storytelling was introduced with the researcher telling the story of the Samaritan woman who met Jesus at Jacob's well (Jn 4:5-42). The group discussed the connections that the story made with their own life story and which character, in the story, they most closely identified. It is in the connection of biblical story and one's personal story that growth in faith takes place. The group was then given a list of biblical stories that included parables about the kingdom of God that were told by Jesus and stories about Jesus, including the story of his birth and resurrection. A list of potential stories, and the stories learned is in the appendix. Participants were invited to look through the stories and pick out five they would like to learn to tell.

The second lesson began with a review of the story from the previous session about the Samaritan woman. The group was invited to identify ten character developments of the Samaritan woman throughout the story. The group was amazed to discover that they had remembered the story and one week later was able to create such a list. The facilitator then told the story of Jesus calming the storm at sea (Mk 4:35-41). The participants then learned the story line by line with the facilitator. Then they worked in pairs to learn the story together, including kinesthetic motions that would help them to remember the story. Each participant then took turns telling the story to the group. Some of the participants decided to tell it as a duet with the person who had learned the story with them. There was much laughter and excitement as they were able to learn and tell the story. The story was then told using exaggerated emotions to help the participants learn to include emotional development into the telling of their stories. The second

session concluded with a brief overview of some of the elements of performance criticism such as plot development, character development, episodes, and the use of colon and periods to determine the sound map of the story. The website Go Telecommunications was referenced as a helper for the participants learning to tell their first story. The assignment for the coming week was to choose one of the stories listed and prepare to tell it to the group for the next week.

Sessions three through six began with a brief discussion of connections with God that people had made throughout the past week. The primary focus was the participants telling their peers the stories that they had learned. The peers listened to the stories and gave feedback. The stories were discussed in terms of the connections that they made with personal stories of people in the group. These connections often raised a discussion of the context of the original story, being similar or different than the present. The group discussed the situation in which they might tell the story to themselves or to someone else. Sessions three and four introduced three ways of memorizing and learning the story: learning the story by episodes, “mulling” the story over and using a picture graph. In session four participants were encouraged to tell their stories to someone outside the group. Session five introduced the elements of a personal invitation, and invited participants to invite others outside the group to worship at the church. Detailed lesson plans for the six-session course are included the appendix. The Jeffersontown Christian church extended the project by one session, using the extra session to evaluate the storytelling process as invitation.

## Data Gathering

Each participant was given a multiple-choice survey of fourteen questions at the beginning of the first session. The survey was designed to measure elements of spiritual discipline that might change during the six-session course, which would indicate the influence that the course of biblical storytelling would have on individual's practice of spiritual discipline. The questions included frequency of reading the Bible and prayer, how they understood Bible stories connecting with and influencing their own personal lives, how many stories about Jesus they could tell, how they might utilize biblical stories after learning, how comfortable they are in sharing their faith and telling stories about Jesus with others, and how they rate their relationship with Jesus. The survey had a month- and day-of-birth indicator. Only participants who provide both before and after surveys were included in the data collection. A table was created to organize the results of the surveys. A numerical value was given to each of the five potential responses in the survey. The resulting table is included in the appendix. A series of bar graphs was created for each question to identify positive or negative shifts of each group.

A focus group interview was conducted as the last session of the course. The first question asked participants to describe their experience of the six-session biblical storytelling course. The group was then asked to discuss how the biblical storytelling course affirmed or questioned the validity of each of the five theses. The recorded discussion flowed openly and freely with little direction from the researcher. That allowed the participants to raise issues that oftentimes were not directly related to the thesis being discussed. They reflected on the overall program and its impact on their faith and life. The last question was about the fifth thesis that suggested that participating in a

biblical storytelling group would lay the foundation for a future congregational biblical storytelling ministry. This question generated a brainstorming session identifying ways in which biblical storytelling might be used in the future.

Individual interviews were performed to validate the focus group interviews plus give individuals an opportunity to explore in more detail how the biblical storytelling program may have impacted their faith and life. The four members of the Christ Lutheran Church group, one individual from South Bend and Pastor G at Jeffersontown Christians Church were interviewed individually. The individual interviewed in South Bend was unable to attend the focus group. Because of the negative response of the focus group interview at Jeffersontown Christian Church, the researcher decided to interview Pastor G with the same questions as the participants in order to better understand the tone of the conversation of the focus group.

The recorded interviews were transcribed into document form. The document was divided into individual comments. The comments were printed out and color-coded into six categories. The categories corresponded to the five theses, plus a general collection of new understandings. For each congregation, the number of comments of each category was compared to the total number of comments from the group interview and individual interviews to achieve a percentage. These percentages identified the categories most frequently mentioned in the interviews. The group interviews for Christ Lutheran Church (CLC) and South Bend (SB) generated a list of comments that were all positive in nature. Jeffersontown Christian Church (JTCC) generated a list that included a majority of comments of a negative nature. Tables representing the data from the interviews are included in the appendix.

The data from CLC and SB was analyzed separately, which indicated a very similar evaluation of the program. The six code categories were then combined to create subcategories for each. This provided the opportunity to report groups and specific responses to the program. JTTC results differed considerably from CLC and SB, therefore the JTTC data was analyzed separately to identify the reasons for the different focus of responses. This data is contained in the Appendix for reference.

### Results CLC and SB

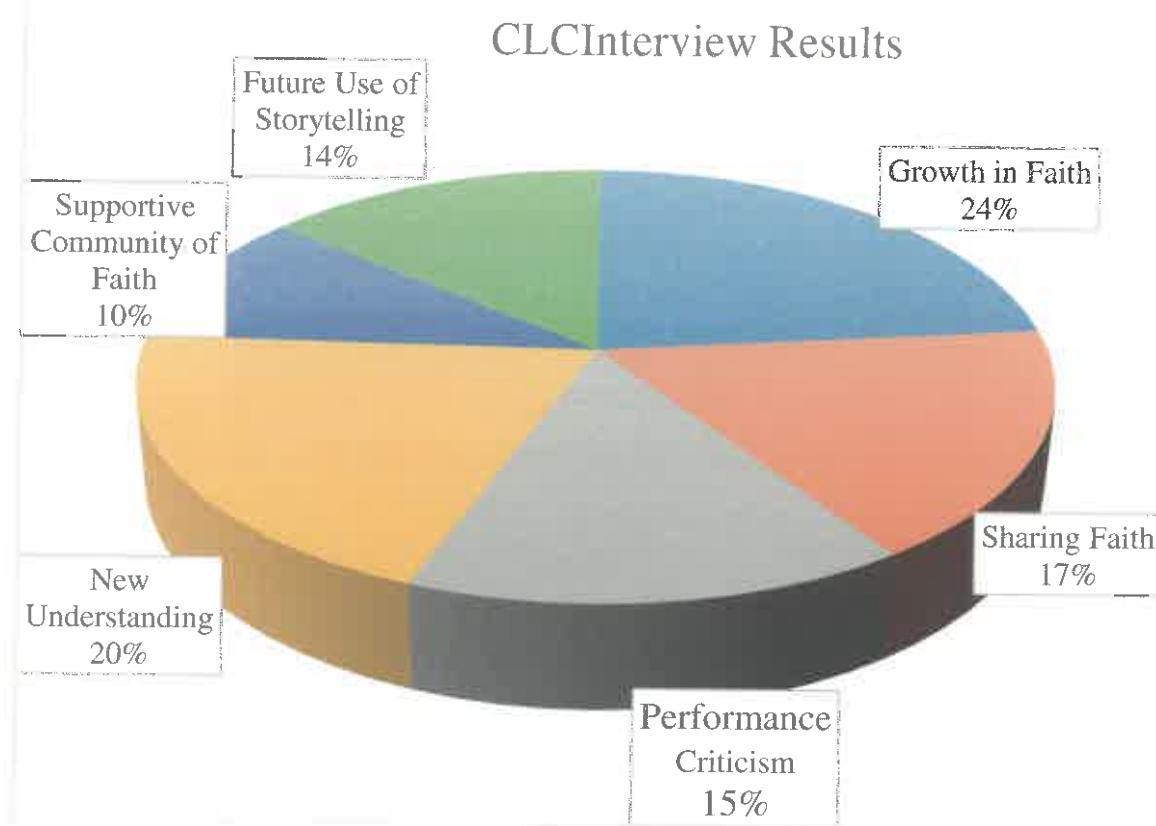


Figure 6.1

Figure 6.1 graphically represents the comments of the group and individual interviews with the CLC group. Growing in Faith, New Understandings and Sharing

Faith are the three largest categories of response. The data indicates the group at CLC validates the hypotheses that the experience of preparing and telling biblical stories by heart with peers can result in a growth in faith in Jesus and the encounter with Jesus in telling biblical stories by heart can equip, empower and encourage faith sharing. The New Understanding category also supported the validation of these two hypotheses. Some of the comments in this category included descriptive words for the course: fun, interesting, and impactful. New understandings also included in new insights into the understanding of biblical truths and the value of telling a biblical story verses reading it.

The hypothesis that the paradigm of performance criticism to study the stories of Jesus and his teachings can lead to new insights and understandings was also validated. The comments in this category identified new understandings that came from analyzing the biblical story using performance critical elements such as plot, character development, role of teller and audience of address, and sound map. The group also commented on the memorization techniques associated with performance criticism as very useful in learning and telling the story.

The percentage for creating a supportive community was low, due to the lack of comments in the group interview about the supportive nature of the group. The issue was raised more frequently in the individual interviews. The discussion of a supportive community in the group interview focused more on the hopeful involvement of the spouses and significant others of group members the next time this course is offered. A number of these comments were coded as faith sharing.

Though low in percentage, the discussion of future biblical storytelling ministry at CLC was quite spirited and generated various possibilities. Since there was interest in future biblical storytelling ministries, the group affirmed the ministry model as a positive and meaningful experience that the group wished to replicate.

The results of the survey taken before and after the course support the interview data that confirms the effectiveness of the course in growing faith. The group scores before and after the course show a positive shift in eight of the fourteen questions. Four of the remaining questions decreased in score, as seen in Figure 2.

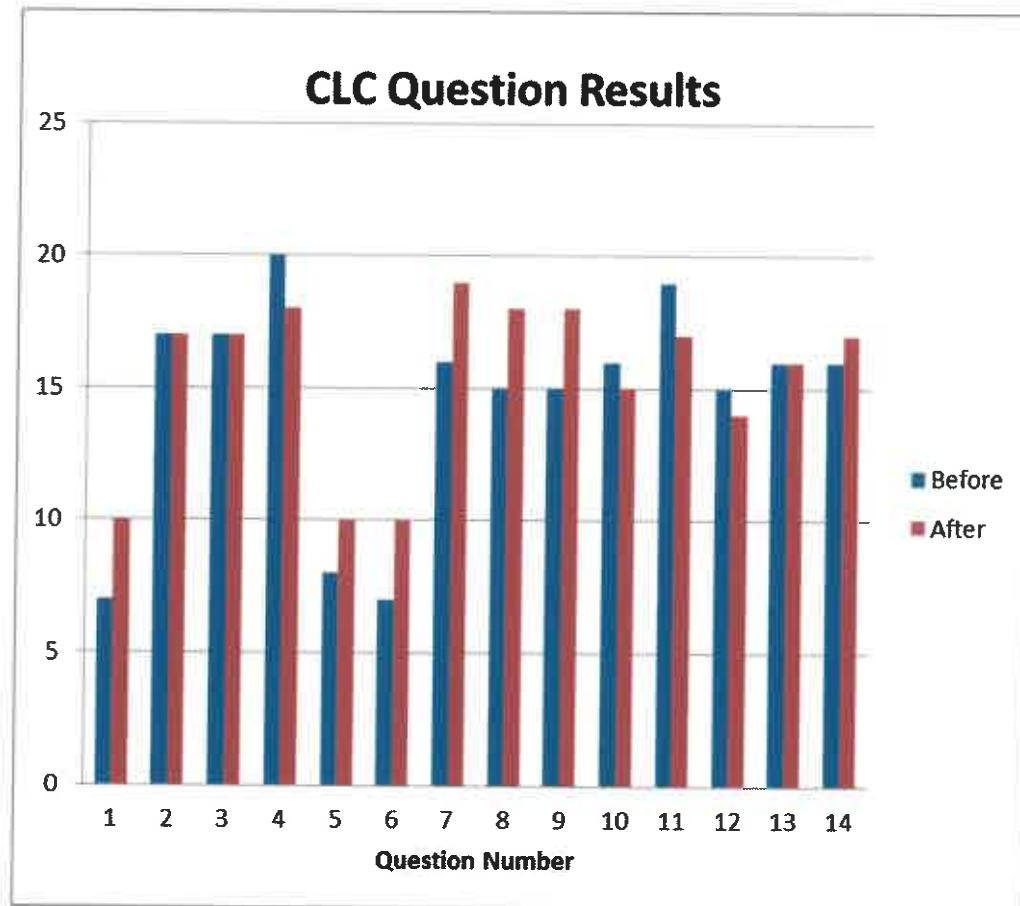


Figure 6.2

Since the three scores that decreased were about the comfort level for inviting a friend to come to know Jesus, telling others about your faith, and telling a story of about Jesus to a friend, the individual scores were considered. The questions for consideration are 10) "How comfortable are you in telling a story about Jesus to a friend?" 11) "How comfortable are you in telling others about your faith?" and 12) "How comfortable are you inviting someone to come to know Jesus?" The choices for response were: very comfortable, comfortable, not sure, uncomfortable, and very uncomfortable. The decrease in score from before to after in these three categories are one person moving from very comfortable to comfortable for questions 10 and 12, and two people moving from very comfortable to comfortable for question 11. Though a decrease in score, none of the persons moved into the uncomfortable area in terms of faith sharing and inviting others. The other decrease was in question four, "Jesus was a real person that lived on this earth. Bible stories help us to know him and believe in me." Four people answered Strongly Agree in the before survey. Strongly Agree and Agree were each chosen by two on the after survey. Though a decrease in total score, none of the participants moved to the disagree area.

Three questions that recorded the greatest positive shift were questions: 7) "Learning to tell biblical stories by heart can help you grow in faith." One score shifted from "not sure" to "agree" and two shifted from "agree" to "strongly agree" 8) "Learning to tell biblical stories by heart can help you share your faith with others." One shifted from "disagree" to "strongly agree" one from "strongly agree" to "agree" and one from "agree" to "strongly agree." 9) Learning to tell biblical stories by heart can equip you to deal with real life situations." One shifted from "not sure" to "agree" and another from

“agree” to “strongly agree.” The positive shifts for these three questions directly affirm the ministry model for the group experiencing growth in their faith. The CLC survey results, group and individual interviews support the five hypotheses that the ministry model of biblical storytelling can produce growth in faith that is then shared by Millennials with their peers.

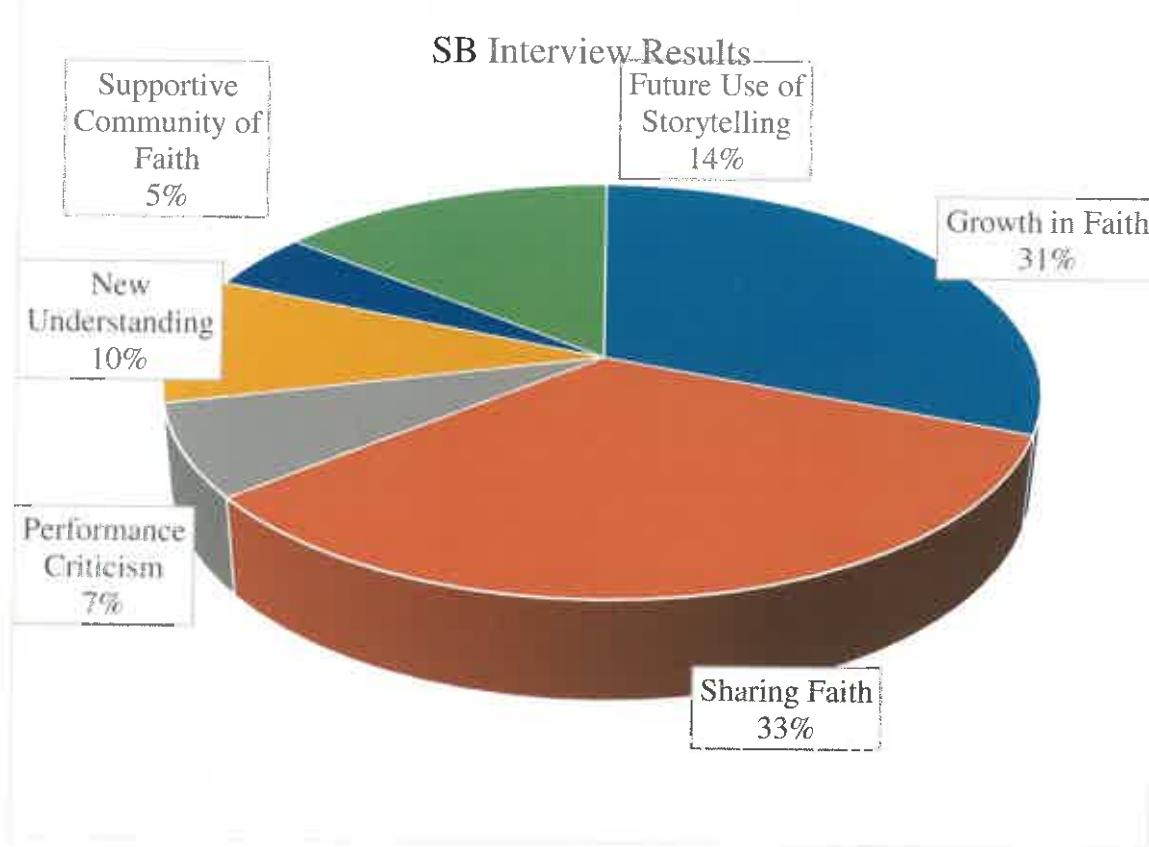


Figure 6.3

Figure 3 graphically represents the comments from the group and individual interviews with the South Bend group. Growth in Faith and Sharing Faith were the two greatest categories of responses with 31% and 33%. Future Use of Storytelling was the third largest category of response with 14%. The two largest categories of response

directly answer affirmatively the question, “Can biblical storytelling with peers, produce growth in faith and a sharing of that faith with others?” This was an extremely positive experience for the South Bend group. The group bonded together throughout the six sessions. They told their stories with enthusiasm and openly discussed their connections between their life story and the biblical story.

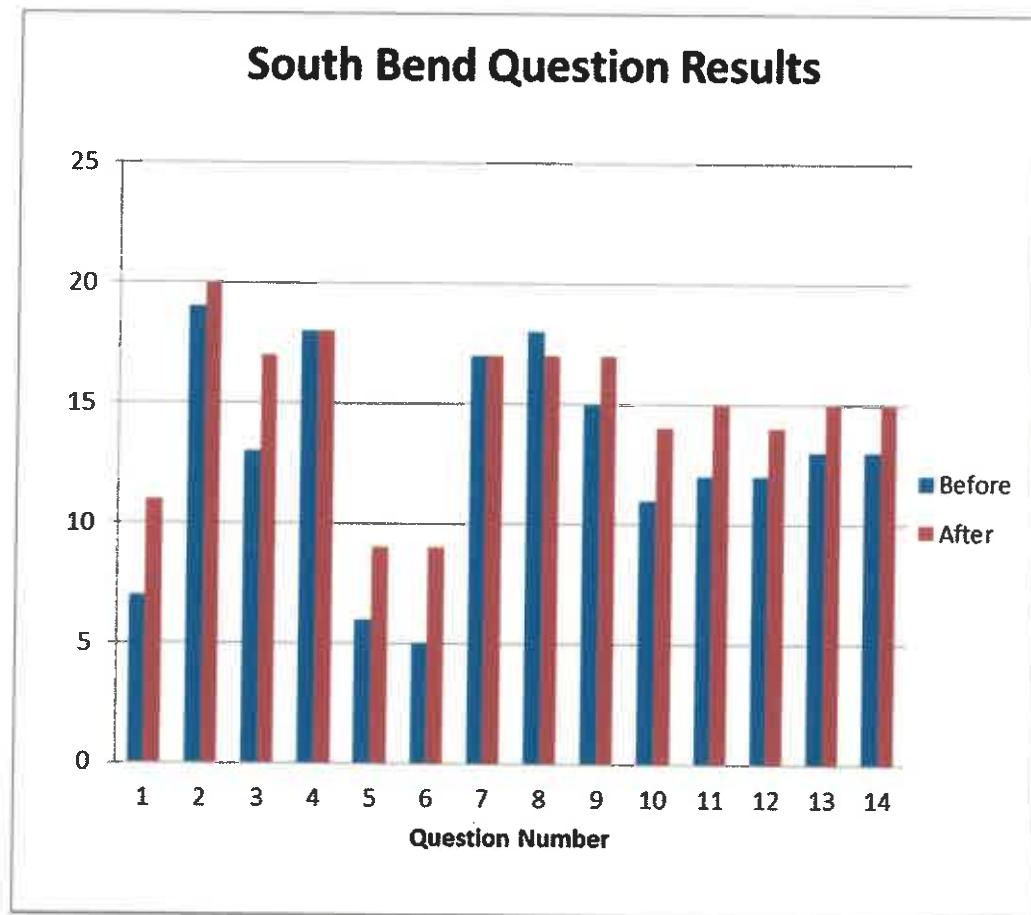


Figure 6.4

Figure 4 records a positive shift on twelve questions and no shift on two. The biggest positive shifts were in questions 1) frequency of reading the bible, 5) number of stories one can tell about Jesus, 6) number of parables of Jesus one can tell. A strong

positive shift is also indicated in question 3) “Biblical stories are just stories that have little connection with my life.” Making connections between the biblical story and one’s life story was a new concept for the group. Naming connections with God in one’s life stories and connection with the biblical stories was a favorite topic for discussion each week. An increased comfort for sharing biblical stories and faith are positive shifts in questions 10-13. These responses indicate a growing comfort and confidence in sharing one’s faith with another.

The SB survey results, group and individual interviews support the five hypotheses that the ministry model of biblical storytelling can produce growth in faith that is then shared by Millennials with their peers.

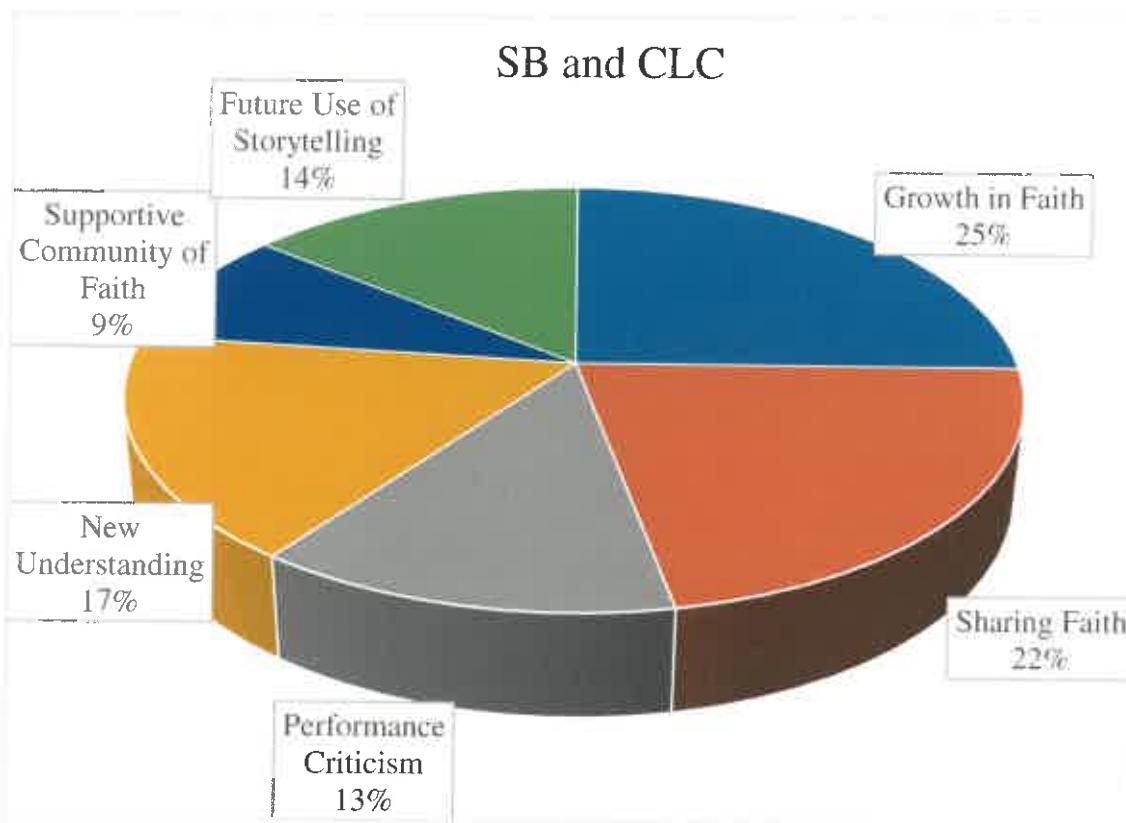


Figure 6.5

The results of the data from CLC and SB were similarly positive. The combined data is shown in Figure 5. The combined data from these interviews of CLC and SB were evaluated to identify subcategories. The subcategories highlighted some specific themes that led to a cavalcade of stories with respect to the biblical storytelling.

The greatest percentage of response dealt with Growth in Faith. That supports the hypothesis that biblical storytelling with peers can be generative for faith. The Growth in Faith category can be broken down into four themes, as presented in Figure 6.

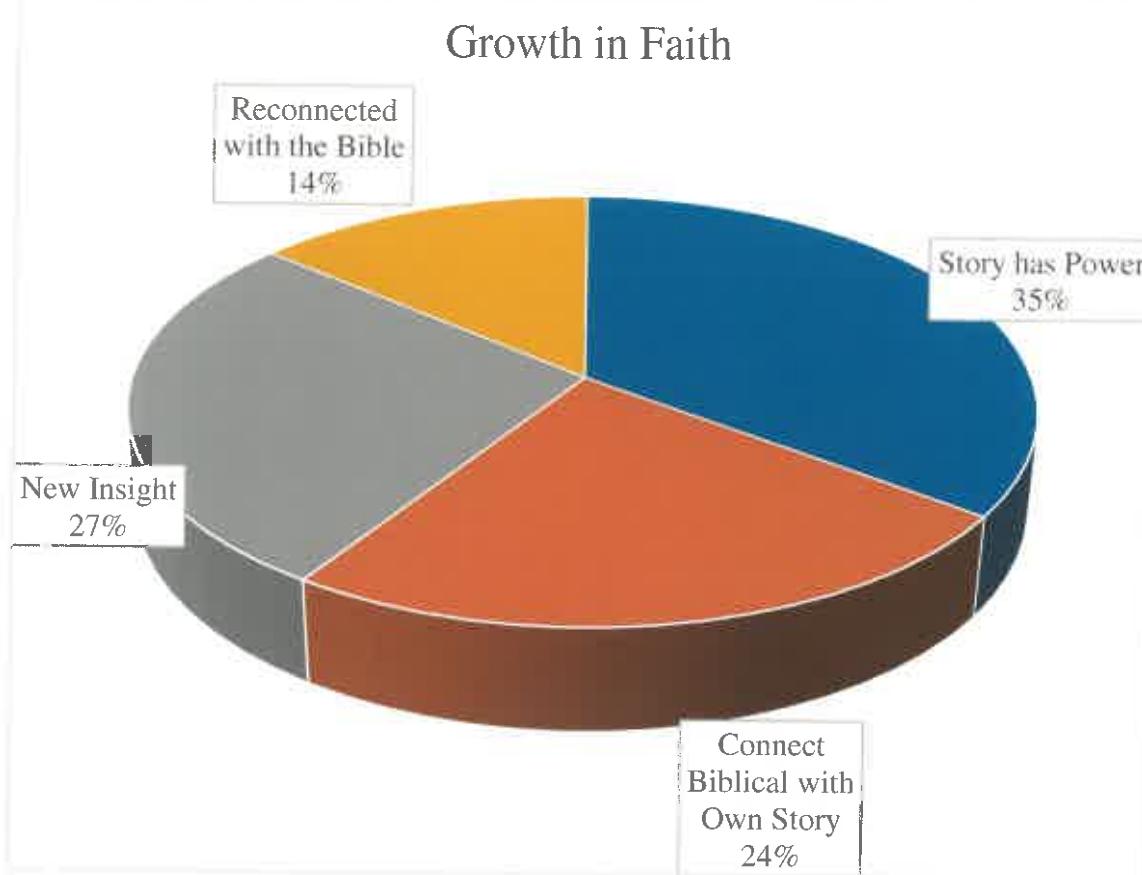


Figure 6.6

Story has power was a theme expressed in a couple of different ways. The first was to experience the power of the biblical story to change one's perception of faith. At the beginning of the course, participants were asked to name a character in the story of the Samaritan woman meeting Jesus at Jacob's well. One of the participants quickly named the disciples, who returned to the well from town, having brought food for Jesus. They were shocked to see Jesus speaking with the Samaritan woman. They were skeptical about what was taking place. So also the participant expressed being skeptical about the storytelling. At the final interview the skeptic declared that he was satisfied that this is a valuable ministry model for faith development. There was great satisfaction to be found in telling the biblical stories to one's family including a small child, as well as telling the stories to the group and discussing the meanings of the stories.

Biblical story also proved to have power all its own. "In what situation might you tell this story to yourself?" was a question that was considered after each story to consider ways in which one might connect with the story. Two individuals in difficult, stressful situations told themselves the story of Jesus calming the sea. In each case, the story told to self, brought a sense of peace and calm.

The subcategory of New Insights referred to those surprising moments of discovery. One individual was hearing these stories for the first time. Being relatively new to the Christian faith, not going to church until marriage was on the horizon. Hearing the stories being told for the first time gave a new perspective. It made them more memorable. Even though the stories had been heard in worship as they were being read, it was different, even new when told. The ministry model encouraged group discussion of the stories that had been told. It was a process that a spouse not interested in the

traditional church worship might find interesting. “We are all looking for something and we find it together.”

Connecting with the story was a rewarding exercise for both groups. By identifying with a character or an event in the biblical story, it gave meaning to one’s own story. “If Jesus did these things for others, he can also do it for me.” Storytelling is a tool that can help in difficult times along with prayer. Sharing connections in the group helped to discover the ways of interpreting the stories and relating to them in a way that impacts one’s life. The prodigal son story initiated some interesting discussion as each member of the group related to the older son, trying to do everything right. In the story of Jesus’ baptism, the group connected with Jesus being cast out into the wilderness following his baptism. Contemporary life can work the same way. Just when things seem to be going well, times of wilderness come. Just as Jesus was ministered to in the wilderness, the Spirit also leads in the contemporary wilderness of this world.

Learning biblical stories each week led participants to read the bible again. It was meaningful to reconnect with things that were previously known and look at them in new ways, providing new understandings about faith and life.

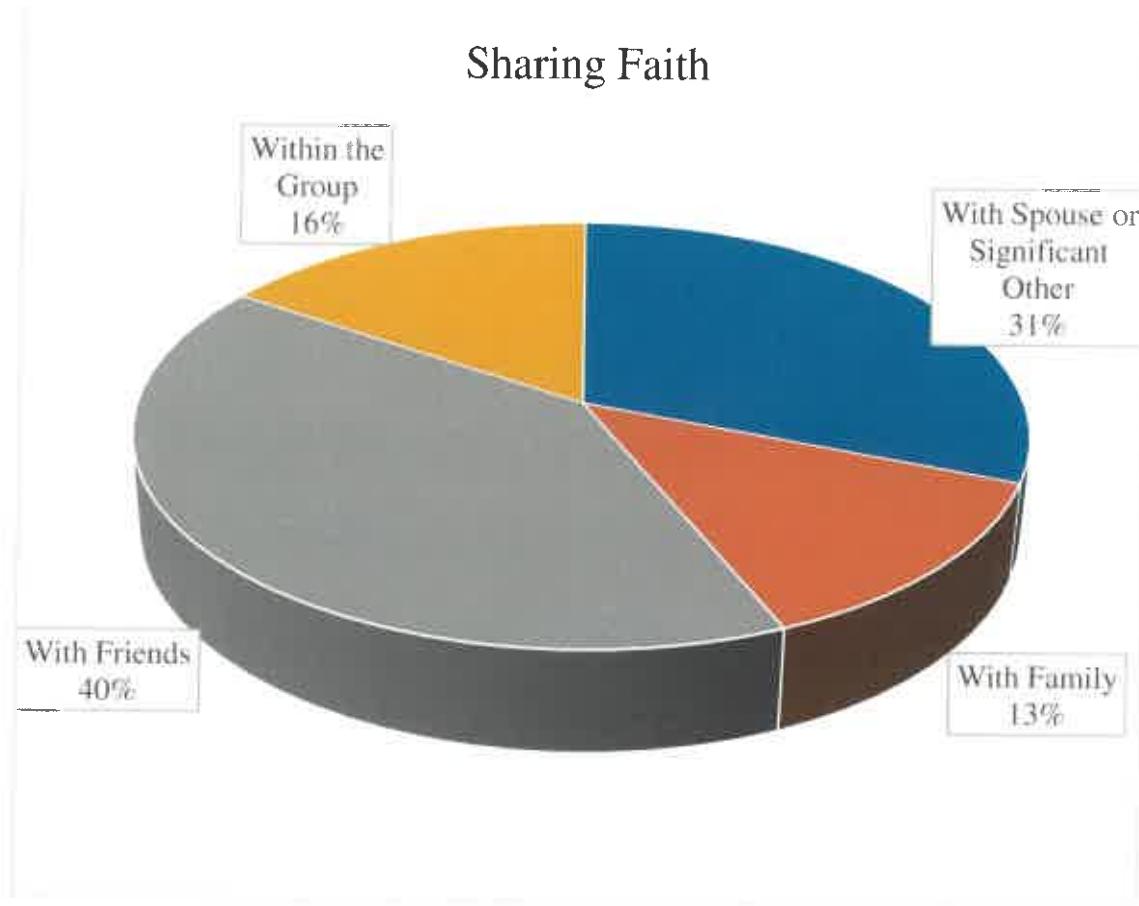


Figure 6.7

Sharing Faith comments were categorized in four themes as shown in Figure 7.

The first theme was sharing one's faith with friends. Indeed, that was a primary hypothesis for this ministry model. Having a biblical story to tell, gives one something to say when talking with others about issues of faith. The faith sharing with friends occurred most often with people who were already connected to faith in Jesus. Knowing a story to tell, made it more comfortable to enter into a conversation with friends about faith.

Friends seemed to be interested in the biblical storytelling course as participants explained it to them, and even told a story.

Telling biblical stories to spouses and significant others was important in each setting, but for different reasons. In SB, two couples participated in the course. They would practice telling their stories with each and talk about the stories and what they meant. The stories were helpful to initiate conversations about faith that did not normally happen. The CLC participants all had spouses or significant others, not actively involved in church. Practicing the stories at home, to tell in the group, generated a lot of interest on the part of the spouses and significant others. It was a non-confrontational way of having conversation about faith issues such as raising children, importance of worshiping together, and trying to understand what each believed. It was the feeling of the CLC group that when the next storytelling study comes, they will invite their spouses and they will come.

Faith Sharing also took place with family members. For parents, they practiced telling their stories to their children. Sometimes the sharing of faith took place in the car while traveling to the storytelling group. One six-year-old child announced that he would learn the story his parents were telling while his parents were at the storytelling group. Family also included relatives. Telling stories seemed to break the ice and was interesting to family members of different generations.

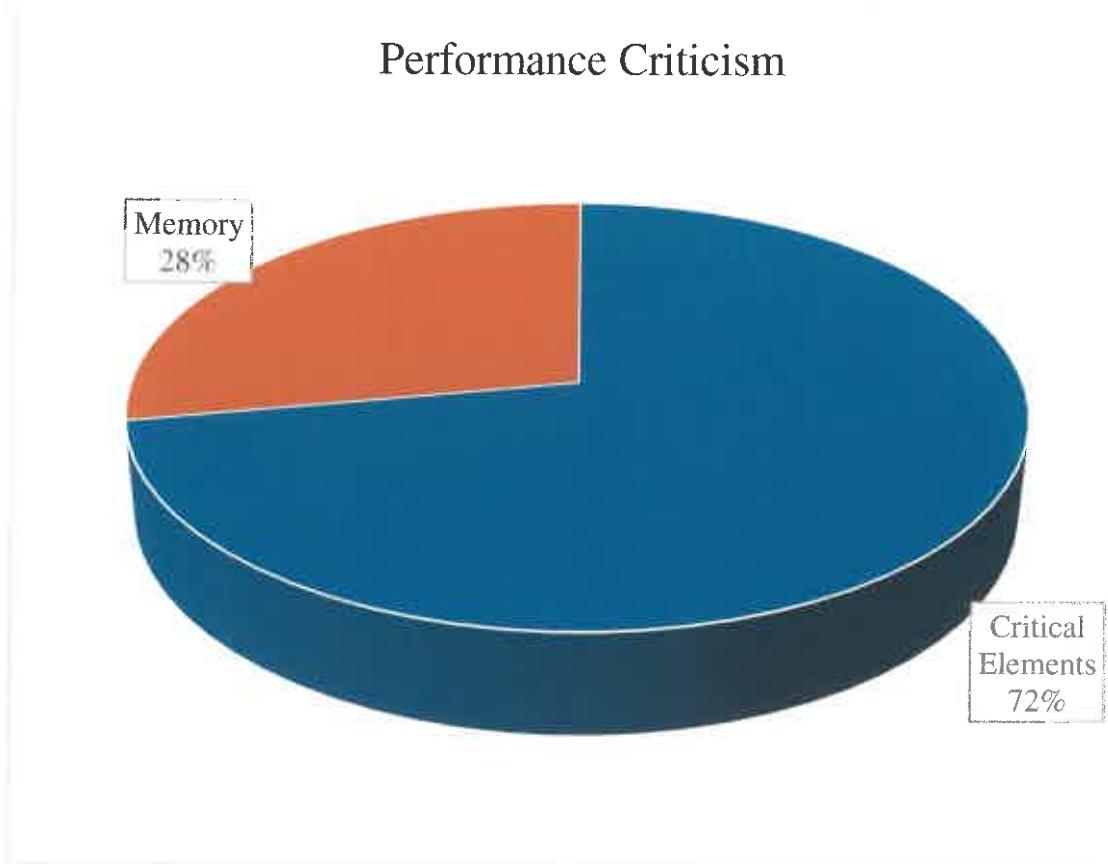


Figure 6.8

Figure 8 reflects the comments with respect to Performance Criticism as identified in the categories of critical elements and memory. One of the critical elements of note was episodes. A sound map divides the story into episodes, built from cola and periods. Dividing the story into episodes helped participants make sense out a confusing text. Thinking and learning the stories in episodes helped the tellers to work on the sound dynamics of the stories. An example given was playing with ways to say the stone rolled back from Jesus' tomb was "very large." The sound of the telling communicated the meaning. The concept of connecting with the story or characters in the story was a new and enriching concept. The category of memory identified body motion or kinesthetic

learning action as a helpful to remember the story. A couple of the participants looked and used words from American Sign Language as body motions for memorization.

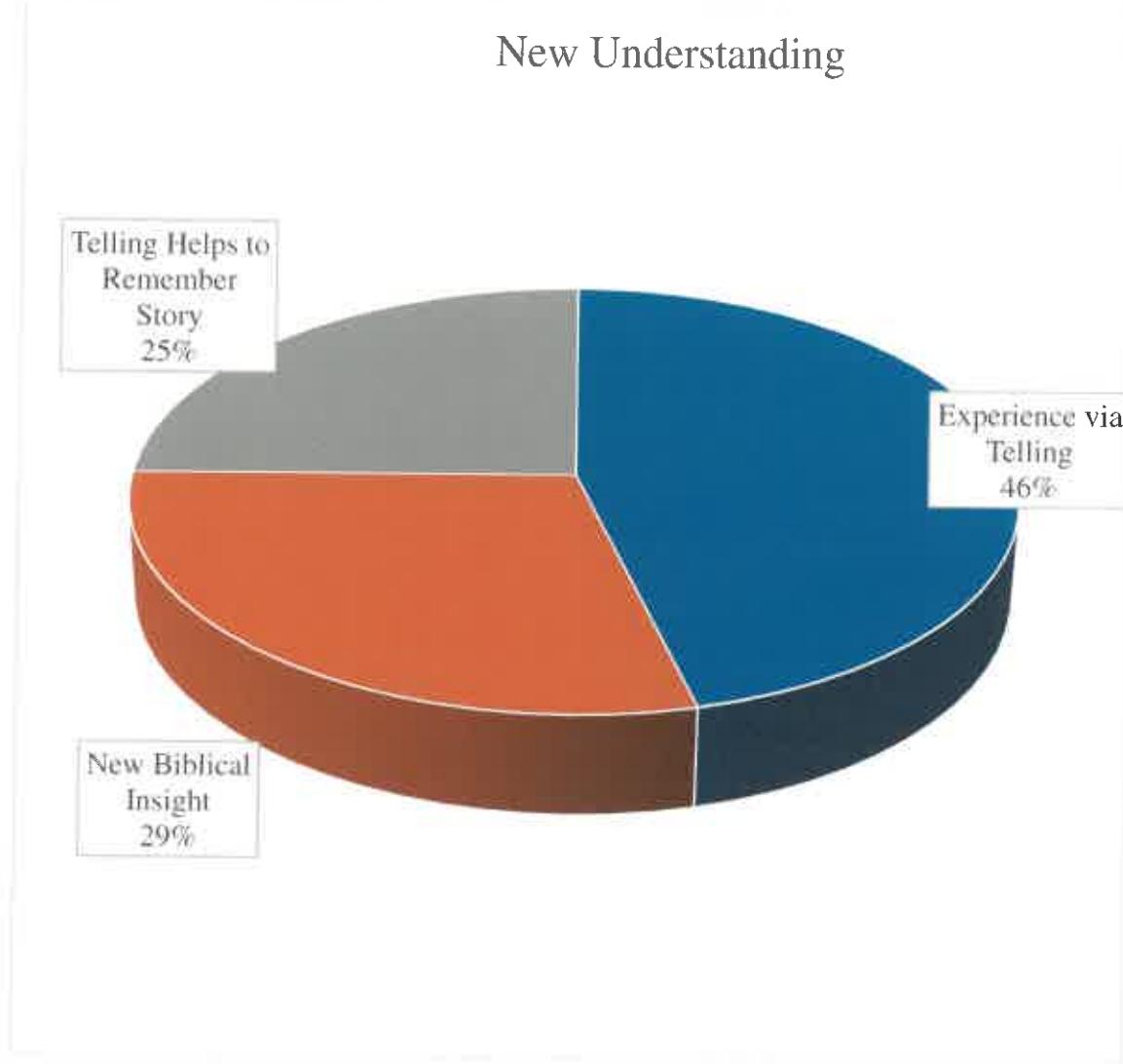


Figure 6.9

The New Understanding category had three thematic breakouts, seen in Figure 9. The most common theme was the wonder of the dynamic of story. At first most of the participants were afraid that they would not be able to learn and tell a story. But they each found their own way to memorize and learn the story, and it became fun. They

discovered that learning and telling a biblical story revealed new meaning and understanding that was not available through reading the story or listening to the story being read or told. One participant, listening to the lessons being read in Sunday worship, thought how much better, more interesting it would be if the lessons were being told. One noted that sometimes when a story is read, it doesn't make sense. But when told, speaking it like you would say, gives the story meaning.

Telling the story empowers memory. One participant described reading a story as going in one ear and out the other. But when telling a story, one needs to pay attention, get a picture of the story being told, which helps to remember it. One participant described being at a church meeting that began with the reading of the call of Samuel. It was hard to remember the story for the few minutes that followed for discussion. But the story about the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, that had been told a week early was remembered in surprising detail. The group together created a list of ten character developments that took place in the story they had heard a week earlier. One of the reason is "storytelling is more conversational, there's much more meaning behind it. You practice it so it sounds right when you say it." There is something about the power of sound that makes a story memorable.

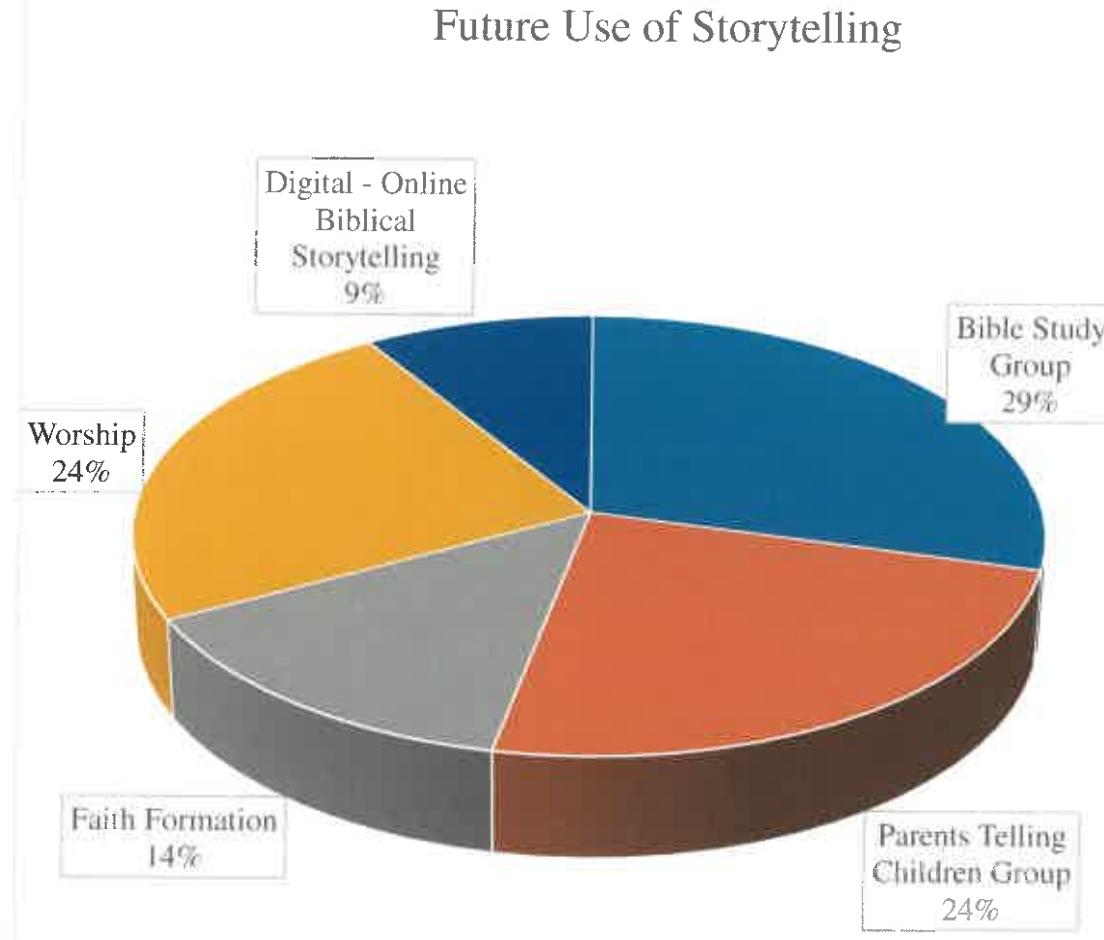


Figure 6.10

A measure of the success or meaningfulness of a ministry model is the interest of those involved in that model to continue it. There was an interest expressed in both groups to use biblical storytelling in a variety of ministries. Figure 10 shows the five categories of responses and their relative weighting. One category was a storytelling

study similar to the one that was just completed. There was excitement in whom they might invite. They also considered ways to tweak the model, perhaps developing it into a worship experience. Participants learning and telling the stories would be an important dynamic. There was interest in parents learning biblical stories together to tell their children. This would include live telling to their children, and creating a DVD of biblical stories that could be popped into the video player in the car for kids to watch while traveling. There was discussion about using storytelling for faith formation groups, like a new member class or confirmation class. Many biblical stories about Jesus, and his parables take a minute or less to tell. They are the perfect length to create a digital collection, maybe called “Reasons for Hope.”

Notes from the facilitator and pastor observer affirm the comments that were recorded in the interviews and the positive results of the survey. Pastor E in South Bend was surprised at the commitment of a group of six people who had never been together before. The facilitator was projected on the wall via Skype. The concept of biblical storytelling was totally new to the group, since the congregation has not yet begun biblical storytelling in worship. All six people were extremely busy. The attendance was exceptional. They would call in if they were going to miss or be late. Two participants joined the group from out of town on face to face by smart phone. They each told stories and were enthusiastic about the story they would learn to tell for the next week.

The Christ Lutheran group rekindled old friendships. Conversation in class carried over into the parking lot as they stood around their cars and talked before leaving for home. They discussed issues of faith as emerging adults, discovering new levels of understanding and faith. There was determination to continue the storytelling ministry

with the hope that it would reach out to people like their spouses and significant others who are not interested in the traditional worship.

#### Jeffersontown Christian Church Results

The experience of the JTCC was described very differently in the group interview and the surveys taken before and after the class. The group expressed an overall negative view of the course as seen in Figure 11. In order to accommodate the negative comments in the data gathering, the data table was designed to record both positive and negative comment for each of the six categories of comments. (Table in appendix)

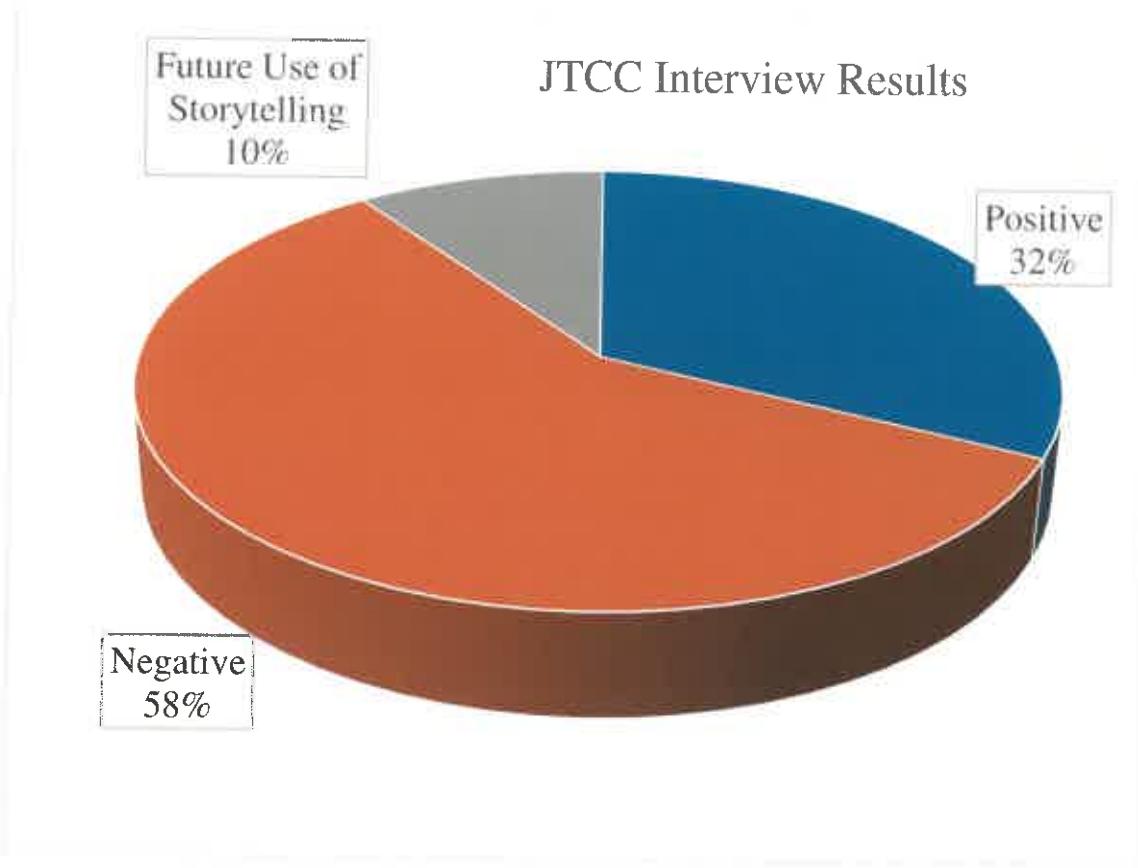


Figure 6.11

When asked about their experience with the course, the three participants involved in the group interview were in agreement that learning the stories was too difficult. It took too long to learn the stories, and they are too busy with work, kids and going to graduate school. They felt like they could never master a story to 75% accuracy and 90% content. They found that creating hand motions for the story got in the way of learning the story. Using episodes to learn the story made it harder, trying to figure out how all the parts fit together.

With respect to storytelling being generative for faith, the group agreed that their faith was not dependent on biblical stories but on their own personal experience. The bible is more about teaching the morals of Jesus and how to live. It is not for picking apart stories to perform them. “This course did not enhance my relationship with Jesus. But I don’t think it hurt it either.” Faith and spiritual growth comes through prayer, and living out one’s life as God intended it to be lived out. “When younger, a child gets the basics from the Bible. But when you get older, you find the world is different, and your faith is dependent on your experience and how you live your life.” Faith comes, not from the biblical stories, but from growing up in the church, the Christian community where everyone is known and raised by faithful people. Besides the biblical stories do not connect with people today. For example the lost sheep story, nobody around here knows about sheep and shepherds. So the story needs to be re-told in contemporary metaphor, “God is looking for you, like a mom who looks until she finds her child that was lost in the store.”

In terms of faith sharing, the group did not think it would be well received if a person walked up to a stranger in the produce aisle at the grocery store and acted out a

biblical story. Rather faith sharing comes when one is on a mission trip, modeling for youth how to help someone rebuild their house, and at the same time show love for the person being helped. The group was 100% in favor of sharing faith with others, but not through telling biblical stories.

The issue of Performance Criticism was intriguing to the group. The concept of reading the story with an eye to tell to others gave a new perspective to the biblical story. The invitation to connect with the characters and events of the biblical story made them come alive in new ways. A couple of the memorizing tools were fun and effective. But the group was inhibited from learning and telling biblical stories, being held captive by the notion of the percentage of memorization expected and the creation of motions to dramatize the telling of the story.

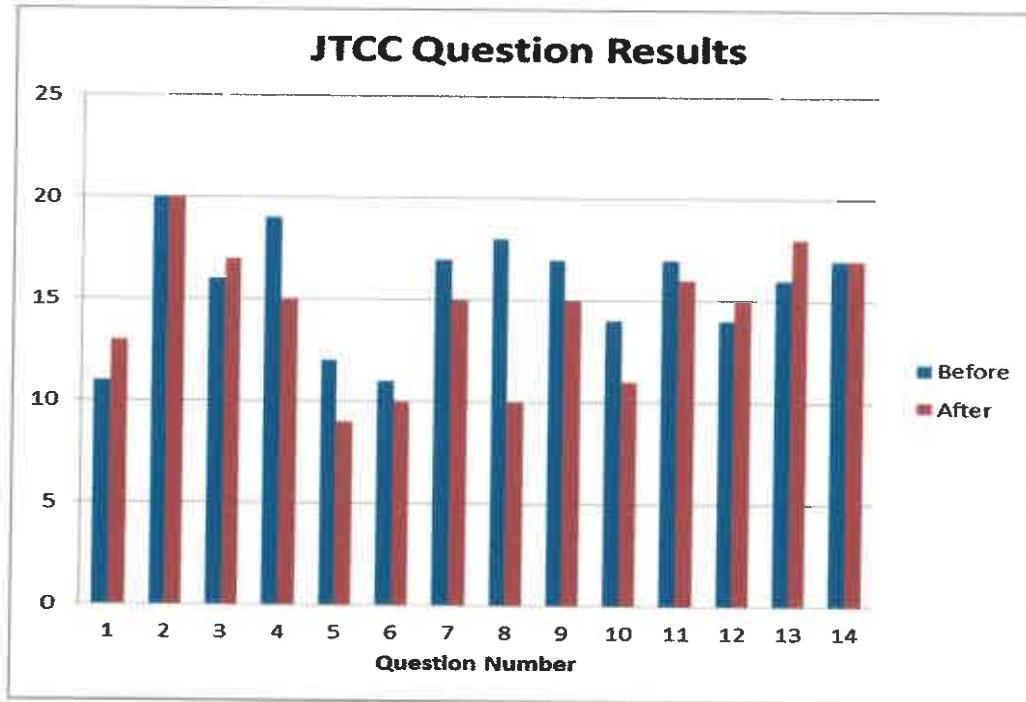


Figure 6.12

The survey results, presented in Figure 12, indicate a negative shift in nine out of the fourteen questions. Questions 7) Learning to tell biblical stories by heart can help you grow in your faith. And 8) Learning to tell biblical stories by heart can help you share your faith with others. These are two questions that speak directly to the main hypotheses of the ministry model. In each case the shift was negative.

The individual interview was conducted with Pastor G, who had served as the facilitator for the group. The goal was to get a different perspective of what happened at JTCC throughout the course. The weekly meeting between Pastor G and the researcher indicated that the sessions were going well and participants were following the lesson plan as outlined in the ministry model.

With respect to Growth of Faith, the concept of the Bible as story was new to them. The stories helped them to look at their faith in a new way, but identifying growth of faith was difficult. The course did help them share their faith with one another and with their children. Their idea of faith sharing had been focused on converting the stranger rather than sharing faith with people they knew. The storytelling helped them to share their faith with one another as they discussed the stories that were told.

The group appreciated the critical elements of Performance Criticism. The barrier the group could not overcome was set in place at the first session, with the telling of the story of the Samaritan woman at the well. The group was in awe of the performance of the story by the researcher. They had not experienced biblical storytelling before. They had set an unrealistic expectation assuming that they were to tell biblical stories with the same proficiency as a seven-year veteran. They learned biblical stories and told them to

one another, but felt as though they were not meeting the high expectation they had set for themselves. The group discussion of faith through experience is a characteristic of Millennials. The group did not discover that biblical stories can become experiences, especially when they are told.

### Conclusion

The data from the interviews and surveys of CLC and SB affirm the hypotheses of this ministry model. A six-session course for Millennials to learn and tell biblical stories with one another can be generative for their faith. These participants were excited about what they had experienced and shared it with others both within and outside the group. Such a ministry model has potential for communicating the Gospel of Jesus to Millennials through peer evangelization. Following the historical Lutheran missionary models in Tanzania and Indonesia, it is conceivable to grow a Millennial church that is vibrant in faith, evangelistic in its outreach and making a difference in the world as they live the future Kingdom of God into the present. Such a phenomenon has the potential to shine hope, love and peace into the darkness of this world.

The experience at JTCC indicates the need to more carefully construct the course for facilitators who are not seasoned biblical storytellers, and are not grounded in the new paradigm of performance criticism. Possible additions to the course include online facilitator training, a training DVD and a DVD for the course to demonstrate the art of biblical storytelling that is to be taught and practiced. The paradigm of performance criticism and the concept of biblical storytelling are new to most churches; hence some resistance to its practice may be expected from the leadership, as well as the congregational members.

This project did not follow through with a digital buddy system for participants. There was conversation in the CLC group about how they had shared on Facebook some of what the group was doing and their Facebook friends were interested. This may be fertile ground for the future.

The Millennial Generation is unlike any generation that has gone before it. Growing up in a post-literate digital culture means they learn differently, communicate differently and will ultimately do church differently. Since Millennials enjoy collaboration, it is essential that they are an integral part of the planning and implementation of the church of the future. Digital communication may be a prominent component of such a church. Literate forms of study and worship that focus on doctrine may need to give way to experiential forms of worship that revolve around oral telling of biblical story. Current church models rely on a preacher to proclaim to the congregation the meaning of the biblical texts of the day. Millennials would be interested in a conversational approach, where each participant has opportunity to make one's own connection with the biblical story and test it out with other peers present and outside the gathering.

The participants at CLC and SB were excited about possible future biblical storytelling ministries. The continuation of the course modeled in this project was strongly endorsed by the CLC group. Each person had in mind others they would invite to be a part of the group, including their unchurched spouses and friends. There was also an interest in exploring a storytelling worship model. Being digital, there was an interest in exploring how the biblical storytelling might go digital. The group might tell stories and make them available on the web. The parents in both groups were interested in a

support group for teaching parents how to tell biblical stories to their children. One possibility that may be explored at SB is creating a DVD that kids could watch in the car during travel. A possibility discussed in all three groups was the telling replacing the reading of the scripture in worship.

I sense God's call for me and CLC to actively invest in a biblical storytelling ministry to reach out to the growing number of Millennials within a five-mile radius of the church, utilizing peer evangelization. I'm not exactly sure how it will ultimately look, but working in collaboration with the Millennials currently in our congregation, the Holy Spirit will lead us into being the next generation of Christ Lutheran Church. Now is a great time to enter into such an adventure as the congregation begins its 226<sup>th</sup> year of ministry.

**APPENDIX A**  
**SUPPORTIVE DOCUMENTS**

### Biblical Storytelling Self-Assessment

Please answer the following questions making an X on the spectrum that most closely relates to your understanding and practice.

1) How often do you read the Bible?

Daily      Weekly    Monthly      Sometimes      Never

2) How often do you pray?

Daily      Weekly      When I have a real need      When I pray for others  
Never

3) Biblical stories are just stories that have little connection with my life.

Strongly agree      Agree      Not sure      Disagree      Strongly disagree

4) Jesus was a real person that lived on this earth. Bible stories help us to know him to believe in him.

Strongly agree      Agree      Not sure      Disagree      Strongly disagree

5) How many stories about Jesus can you tell with detail and understanding?

0 – 1      2 – 3      4 – 5      6 – 7      8 – 10

6) How many parables of Jesus can you tell with detail and understanding?

0 – 1      2 – 3      4 – 5      6 – 7      8 – 10

7) Learning to tell biblical stories by heart can help you grow in your faith,

Strongly agree      Agree      Not sure      Disagree      Strongly disagree

8) Learning to tell biblical stories by heart can help you share your faith with others.

Strongly agree      Agree      Not sure      Disagree      Strongly disagree

9) Learning to tell biblical stories by heart can equip you to deal with real life situations.

Strongly agree      Agree      Not sure      Disagree      Strongly disagree

10) How comfortable are you in telling a story about Jesus to a friend?

Very comfortable      Comfortable      Not sure      Uncomfortable      Would never do that

11) How comfortable are you in telling others about your faith?

Very comfortable      Comfortable      Not sure      Uncomfortable      Would never do that

12) How comfortable are you inviting someone to come to know Jesus?

Very comfortable      Comfortable      Not sure      Uncomfortable      Would never do that

13) How comfortable are you inviting someone to come to church?

Very comfortable      Comfortable      Not sure      Uncomfortable      Would never do that

14) How would you rate your relationship with Jesus?

Excellent      Good      Mediocre      Needs help      No real relationship

### Individual and Group Interviews

CLC	Individual	Group	Total	Percentage
Growth in Faith	17	7	24	23
Sharing Faith	11	7	18	17
Performance Criticism	10	6	16	15
New Understanding	12	9	21	20
Supportive Community of Faith	11	0	11	10
Future Use of Storytelling	11	4	15	14
<b>SB</b>				
Growth in Faith	4	9	13	34
Sharing Faith	5	9	14	37
Performance Criticism	1	2	3	8
New Understanding	1	3	4	11
Supportive Community of Faith	1	1	2	5
Future Use of Storytelling	2	4	6	16
<b>JTCC</b>				
Growth in Faith +	0	1	1	2
Growth in Faith -	0	7	7	14
Sharing Faith +	1	2	3	6
Sharing Faith -	1	7	8	16
Performance Criticism +	2	2	4	8
Performance Criticism-	1	6	7	14
New Understanding +	3	4	7	14
New Understanding -	0	7	7	14
Supportive Community of Faith +	1	0	1	2
Supportive Community of Faith -	1	0	1	2
Future Use of Storytelling	3	2	5	10

## Combined Individual and Group for CLC and SB

Combined CLC & SB	Individual	Group	Total	Percentage
Growth in Faith	21	16	37	25%
Sharing Faith	16	16	32	22%
Performance Criticism	11	8	19	13%
New Understanding	13	12	25	17%
Supportive Community of Faith	12	1	13	9%
Future Use of Storytelling	13	8	21	14%

## LESSON PLAN OBJECTIVES

### Session 1

- 1) Participants will get acquainted with one another via storytelling.
- 2) Participants will experience the telling of a biblical story.
- 3) Participants will process the story by making personal connections with the biblical story.
- 4) Participants will create a list of potential stories to learn for telling.
- 5) Participants will receive an overview of the course.

### Session 2

- 1) Participants will learn to tell a biblical story.
- 2) Participants will tell the biblical story to the group.
- 3) Participants will learn some basic principles of performance criticism.
- 4) Participants will explore gotell website as a resource for storytelling preparation.
- 5) Participants will choose a story to learn for telling at the next session.

### Session 3

- 1) Participants will continue to grow in relationship with one another.
- 2) Participants will tell, to the group, the story they have prepared.
- 3) The group will identify personal connections with the told biblical stories.
- 4) Participants will learn the process of MULLing a story.
- 5) Participants will prepare a story to be told at the next session.

### Session 4

- 1) Participants will tell prepared biblical stories and discuss personal connections with them.
- 2) Participants will identify situations one might tell the story to self, or to another.
- 3) Participants will use a picture graph of a story as a method of preparation.
- 4) Participants will be encouraged to tell a biblical story to someone outside the group.
- 5) Participants will prepare a story to tell at the next session.

### Session 5

- 1) Participants will tell prepared biblical stories to the group.
- 2) Participants will make personal connections with biblical stories.
- 3) Participants will discuss the principles of a personal invitation.
- 4) Participants will explore storytelling as an opportunity for invitation.
- 5) Participants will learn, for the next session, the Easter story from the Gospel of Mark.

## Session 6

- 1) Participants will tell the Easter story to the group and discuss personal connections.
- 2) Participants will review sharing biblical stories and invitations to those outside the group.
- 3) Participants will review the stories that have been told by the group.
- 4) Participants will consider possible extensions of the biblical storytelling ministry.

## Session 7

- 1) Participants will review the course in a focus interview format.

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